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EQUUS

THE HORSE OWNER'S RESOURCE

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DECEMBER 2015





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P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142

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EQ LETTERS



Giving thanks

I thoroughly enjoyed "In Gratitude" (Back Page, EQUUS 456). Whenever I spend time with my horse, Magic, whether it's trail riding, lessons, groundwork or just hanging out together, I always pat him and say, "Thank you." I'm almost 70 years old and we have been together 12½ years. He is my first and only horse, and he has been so patient with me as we learn together.

Phyllis Murdock
Hampton, Illinois

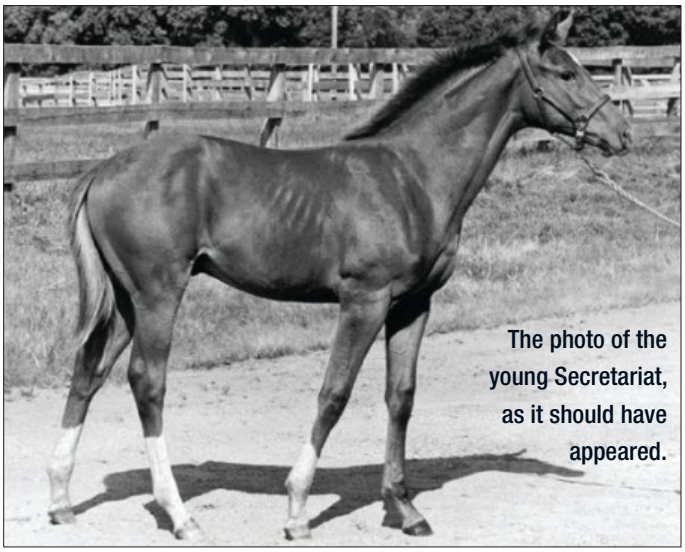
Looking backward

I really enjoyed the articles on American Pharoah and the other racehorses (American Pharoah: Making History," Special Report, EQUUS 458). I did find it amusing that on page 66 ("Nature Versus Nurture"), the front leg marking is on the wrong side in the weanling photo of Secretariat. The photo was flopped.

Safety first

I was very concerned to see the way the lead chain was used on the horse in your October cover (EQUUS 457). It was run through the halter ring and clipped back onto the lead so that the chain forms a loop. This loop, though small, can catch on any protruding object the horse might lean his head over, rub his chin on, or just get too close to. Worse, if he put his head down, he could get a hoof through the loop, with potentially tragic results. Although the halter is leather, it looks to be the heavy-duty, double-stitched variety, unlikely to break.

Lynn Acton
Berkshire, New York



The photo of the young Secretariat, as it should have appeared.

Secretariat is my favorite racehorse. I once had the privilege of seeing him in his paddock. He rolled as I was watching, and as he was getting up, a dog walked through his paddock. So the greatest racehorse sat on his butt and watched the dog walk by before he finished getting up.

Diane Johnson
Doerun, Georgia

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Handle with care

I just read "Wash Before Use" (Letters, EQUUS 454), about the person whose Paint sustained what appeared to be chemical burns after wearing brand-new, unwashed fly boots.

My horse, too, experienced something similar from a new fly sheet. When I complained to the company I bought it from, they said they'd never heard of any such thing, but they did fully refund my purchase price when I returned the sheet. This was in the summer of 2014.

It's good to know I wasn't crazy, but I'm sorry someone else's horse had to suffer as well. We treated my horse with a basic topical ointment and kept cold, wet towels on the lesions, and my barn managers helped to monitor the situation. My horse healed very well with no scarring, and even in his summer coat this year, nothing was noticeable.

Name withheld upon request

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- **Back Page**—essays that illustrate an aspect of equestrian life.
- **Case Report**—accounts by equine practitioners and horse owners of unusual or baffling cases of equine illness or injury.
- **Feature articles** generally run from 1,600 to 3,000 words.
- **Medical Front**—brief articles about the latest research, technological advances, treatments and other veterinary topics pertinent to horse owners.
- **True Tale**—true stories that focus on experiences that typify the multifaceted relationships we have with our horses.
- **Perspective**—personal insights and opinions on various topics of importance to the horse world.

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By Christine Barakat and Mick McCluskey, BVSc, MACVSc



DO THIS, NOT THAT: Researchers report that a form of positive reinforcement commonly used to teach developmentally disabled people proved effective in training horses.

ARND BRONKHORST

BE SURE TO **REWARD** THE RIGHT BEHAVIOR

Your first instinct when your horse impatiently paws in the cross ties may be to yell "Quit it!" but researchers at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, recommend a more positive approach—specifically, a technique called differential reinforcement of other behavior (DRO).

Often used in the instruction of developmentally disabled people, DRO calls for rewarding an individual for refraining from a particular behavior for a designated period of time.

To test whether this technique can be used to change equine behavior, the St. Lawrence researchers selected three privately owned horses kept at stables near the university campus. The horses shared one particular behavior, says Adam Fox, PhD: "All three pawed on the cross ties enough that the owners expressed a desire for the behavior to decrease."

The study was designed to work around each horse's regular schedule, incorporating one to three training sessions per day, approximately three days a week. Before the training began, a baseline measurement of how long each horse would stand quietly without pawing was recorded. "Initially, there was quite a bit of variability [in pawing frequency] among the horses," says Fox. "One horse pawed a lot—hundreds of times in a 20-minute session. Another pawed less—20 to 40 times in a 20-minute session."

Once training began, the researchers gave the horses food rewards whenever they did not paw for the duration of their baseline intervals. As the trials progressed, the researchers customized their approaches to each of the horses, altering the interval of time required to earn a treat. "For one horse, that interval was gradually extended, so he had to go longer and longer to be rewarded," says Fox. "For another horse we maintained the interval we started with, and it was effective [at reducing the behavior]. For the third horse we actually decreased the interval to increase the effectiveness of the intervention. So there were some idiosyncrasies between horses in terms of initial sensitivity to the intervention, but we were able to modify the intervention to each horse's behavior in order to maximize effectiveness."

At the end of the study period—approximately 30 training sessions—each of the three horses was pawing significantly less. In the

Reference: "Reducing pawing in horses using positive reinforcement," *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis,* August 2015

most dramatic case, a horse went from pawing more than 100 times per 20-minute session to pawing less than two times during the same time period.

Beyond showing that DRO can work with horses, says Fox, this study demonstrates that behavior is determined by the consequences associated with it, which explains how people can inadvertently encourage the development of bad habits in horses.

"It is important to understand that anytime you give a horse food—and probably attention, too—you make whatever the horse is doing at that time more probable in the future; that's reinforcement," says Fox. "For example, a pawing horse may be given a treat. This treat may stop the animal from pawing—the human's behavior of providing the treat is negatively reinforced by the removal of the pawing behavior, but the horse's behavior of pawing has been positively reinforced with the food. This means that while pawing has ceased, it is actually more likely to occur in the future. The human's behavior has been reinforced, too, such that in the future when the horse is pawing the human is more likely to give the horse a treat. It is easy to see the trouble here."



LEARNING BY OBSERVATION

A new study from Denmark suggests that foals take cues from their mothers when reacting to potentially frightening stimuli.

Using desensitization techniques, Aarhaus University researchers trained 22 pregnant mares to respond calmly to five different fear-inducing situations, such as having a plastic bag wiped over their bodies or standing next to an opening umbrella. After the mares foaled, their offspring were divided into two groups: Half of the youngsters watched as their dams were exposed to the fear-inducing situations once a week for the first eight weeks of their lives. The remaining foals watched their dams being handled for the same amount of time, but without encountering the stimuli.

Three months later, the foals were exposed to the same fear-inducing stimuli that their dams had encountered, along with entirely new potentially frightening objects.

The researchers report that the youngsters who had observed their dams face scary situations calmly were less likely to be frightened than foals who had not. What's more, these foals were also likely to exhibit more exploratory behaviors.

The researchers conclude that this "effect was likely achieved through a combination of maternal transmission and individual learning."

Reference: "Early-life object exposure with a habituated mother reduces fear reactions in foals," ***Animal Cognition,*** **September 2015**

ALTERNATIVE **LICE REMEDIES** TESTED

British researchers report that two common essential oils—tea tree and lavender—show promise in treating lice that are increasingly resistant to commercial pesticides.

Found primarily on donkeys and horses, *Bovicola ocellatus* are known as "chewing lice" because they feed on dander rather than drawing blood meals. For their study, University of Bristol researchers identified 198 barn-kept donkeys infested with *B. ocellatus*.

After initially quantifying the level of each animal's parasite load, the researchers divided the donkeys into three treatment groups: One received two topical treatments with a 5 percent tea tree oil solution two weeks apart; the second received two topical lavender oil

FRANK SORGE/ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY

treatments at the same interval; the third group was treated with an inert substance to serve as controls.

When each animal was again evaluated at the end of the study period, the researchers found a dramatic decline in the level of infestation among both groups treated with tea tree oil or lavender oil. In fact, lice infestation on those animals declined by an average of 78 percent. In the control group, which received no treatment, lice populations either stayed the same or increased.

The researchers conclude that essential oils can be an effective means of louse control.



chewing louse

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Reference:
"Essential oils in the management of the donkey louse, *Bovicola ocellatus*," *Equine Veterinary Journal*, March 2015

HOW HERD LEADERS **WEIGH IN**

For all the advantages that a herd leader enjoys, there appears to be a potential downside: a higher risk of obesity.

Researchers at the University of Bristol in England recorded social interactions between 203 horses in 42 different herds on continual turnout. A feeding trial was conducted to determine each herd's social structure by setting out individual buckets of feed and observing which horses displaced others to take their food. Scores were assigned based on how many herdmates a particular horse displaced and how often horses were displaced by others.

Using this data, the researchers calculated a food-context-specific dominance rank for each horse. The researchers also assigned each horse a body[0] condition score.

They found that the more dominant horses generally had higher body condition scores and were more likely to be obese (a score of 7 or higher) than were their lower-ranking herdmates.

Although it's tempting to assume that dominant horses put on the pounds because they take more food, researcher Sarah Giles, PhD, says this study doesn't prove that definitively.

"To find this out would require a longitudinal investigation of body condition and dominance status over time in a stable, unchanging herd," she says. "The reason for their obesity might not be simply down to the amount of food they consume. Being dominant may mean they spend less time moving

GOOD AND BAD NEWS

A new study of cleft palate in horses shows that while it leads to euthanasia in half of affected horses, the condition is, thankfully, extremely rare.

Cleft palate is a congenital defect in the roof of the mouth, leading to a split down the center of the structures. The condition can involve the hard palate (the bony front portion of the roof of the mouth), the soft palate (the softer back portion of the roof of the mouth), or both.

"The causes of cleft palate in horses are poorly understood and believed to be multifactorial," says Sarah Shaw, DVM, of Texas A&M University. "Causes may include genetic factors, exposure to ionizing radiation or teratogens[0], vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and the administration of some drugs during pregnancy."

In a retrospective study, Shaw's team found that the incidence of cleft palate in horses was only 0.04 percent among horses admitted to the university clinic from 1988 to 2011, with a total of 28 cases identified. Half of those were foals less than 2 months of age when the diagnosis was made, 21 percent were between 2 months and one year, and 29 percent were older than one year.

Shaw says diagnosis may be delayed because of the unseen nature of many cases.



PAULA DA SILVA/ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY

away from other herdmates and so also expend less energy."

Furthermore, there was not a strictly linear relationship between body condition score and dominance. In other words, the second-ranking horses weren't always the second fattest and the lowest ranking horses weren't always the thinnest. "There were even herds that were complete exceptions, where the most dominant was the skinniest," says Giles.

This study has important implications for horse owners in terms of informed preventive care of dominant horses, she says: "I don't think these results suggest by any means that being dominant makes a horse fat, but rather that owners should just be aware and perhaps keep a closer eye on the body condition of dominant animals knowing that they are more prone to obesity."

Reference: "Dominance rank is associated with body condition in outdoor-living domestic horses *(Equus caballus)*," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, May 2015

ABOUT **CLEFT PALATE** IN HORSES

"No primary palate defects [those that involve the nostrils and lips] were identified in this study. All of the defects involved either the hard and/or soft palate." The most common defects, she adds, affect the rear two-thirds of the soft palate, meaning they are not outwardly visible and are found only during an endoscopic exam of the pharynx.

Even without visible signs of the defect, there are usually other indications of palate problems. "Most commonly, foals with cleft palate will demonstrate dysphagia [difficulty eating and swallowing] that results in bilateral nasal discharge of milk," Shaw says. "Older animals with cleft palates may have persistent nasal discharge, cough, or have a history of pneumonia or respiratory infections."

Eleven percent of the study horses underwent surgical repair of their cleft palate, 4 percent received only supportive care (such as treating resulting respiratory infections) and 32 percent had no treatment. Of the 28 cases of cleft palate, 46 percent survived to be discharged from the hospital.

About 50 percent of the horses with cleft palate were euthanized, a rate that might reflect concern over the potential complications of treatment. "Cleft palates can result in aspiration pneumonia," says Shaw, "which can be life-threatening, so surgical correction is often recommended. However, surgical complications such as dehiscence [reopening] of the suture line, osteomyelitis [infection] of the mandible, and chronic dysphagia are reported to occur in up to 90 percent of attempted repairs. Yet, in this study, most cases that were euthanatized were not treated surgically. The likelihood of complications and the cost of surgical and medical therapy may have influenced owners' decisions."

On a more positive note, the researchers identified a few adult horses who were managing quite well despite a cleft palate. "None of these horses had involvement of the hard palate, and it is possible that they had more minor defects of the soft palate for which they were able to compensate," says Shaw. "A number of these horses had careers as riding horses or racehorses without any apparent deleterious effects of their cleft palate."

Reference: "Clinical characteristics of horses and foals diagnosed with cleft palate in a referral population: 28 cases (1988-2011)," *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, July 2015

By Christine Barakat with Melinda Freckleton, DVM



BE WARY OF WINTER FOOTING

Maximizing turnout time is nearly always the best thing for a horse's physical and mental health, and even in frigid temperatures, most cope remarkably well if they are wearing appropriate blankets and have access to shelter. However, winter weather can sometimes create hazardous footing, especially for older, arthritic horses. It might be wise to change your turnout routines or keep your horses in for the day if your pastures have any of these conditions:

• **Deep snow.** A fit, healthy horse can navigate deep snow well enough, but it can be physically tiring. Over time, horses will trample paths between important locations—hay, water, shelter—and stick to them until the snow melts. You can make this process easier for them by turning them out while the snow is still falling, so they can create their pathways as it accumulates. That way, they'll never have to wade through deeper drifts to reach a vital resource.

• **Frozen deep mud.** A churned-up pasture that freezes solid becomes a treacherous course of unforgiving divots and peaks waiting to twist joints and bruise hooves. If you have a horse with sensitive feet or who has any trouble with balance, skip turnout until warmer temperatures soften the mud.

• **Thick ice.** If your turnout area looks icy, carefully walk out onto the surface and stomp. If your weight breaks the ice, your horses will be fine on it. Thicker ice, however, can cause serious injuries if a horse slips and falls. If your ice is too thick to break through, consider an alternative turnout space, such as an indoor arena, or perhaps another pasture that gets more direct sunlight, until the ice melts.

MARIELLE ANDERSSON/ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY

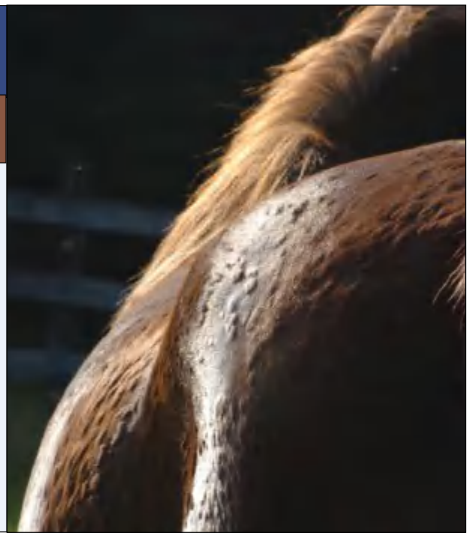
POP QUIZ

OUT OF TOUCH

Q: Your horse was fine an hour ago, but now his skin is covered with dozens of flat-topped welts about the size of a quarter. What is the most likely culprit?

a. insect bites
b. something he ate
c. something he touched
d. the weather

For the answer, see page 19.



DUSTY PERIN

HOLIDAY DÉCOR **SAFETY**

Decorating your barn for the holidays is fun. But you'll want to take some precautions to keep your horses safe for the season.

• **Avoid holiday greenery and garlands that incorporate toxic plants.** Yew, for example, is commonly used in wreaths, and even a small amount can be rapidly fatal to horses.

• **Hang tempting decorations out of reach.** A stocking filled with carrots, for example, will likely be pulled into the stall and eaten within minutes—worst-case consequences could include choke

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*Source: Survey conducted in February 2014 of equine veterinarians who recommend oral joint health supplements.

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One of my most useful barn tools is the head of an old manure fork that is missing its handle. The head acts as an extra "big hand" to help pick up spilled hay and load my feeder bags. I use it every day.—*Dee Whitt, Camp Verde, Arizona*

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YEW

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or colic. If your horse is the sort who will nibble at anything new or unusual, keep all decorations well away from his stall door and turnout space.

• **Inspect all wiring on lights.** The insulation on older light strings may deteriorate over the years, and pests may chew on the cords. When buying new lights, select those labeled for outdoor use with bulbs that do not heat up. Shut off all lights when you leave the barn at night, or use a timer or remote device to turn them off from the house before you turn in.

• **Don't frighten the horses.** Large, rustling red bows, jingling sleigh bells and singing Santas may put you in the holiday mood, but for horses unaccustomed to the sights and sounds, they can be terrifying. Approach your horse cautiously with any unfamiliar decorations, read his body language carefully and respect any fears he may have.

TIMETABLE TO **WELLNESS**

A whole day has passed since your veterinarian was out to see your sick, feverish horse. You've been administering his medications on schedule, but he doesn't seem to be improving. Is it



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time to call your veterinarian again? Maybe—but probably not.

At the end of a farm call, your veterinarian will likely tell you when to expect to see signs of improvement. Sometimes a busy veterinarian might forget to mention this, however, so get into the habit of asking. And consider taking notes during veterinary visits so you can keep track of important details, which are easy to forget if you're worried or emotionally stressed. Referring to your notes will help you decide if your horse's recovery is taking too long.

As your horse improves, take his temperature twice a day. As a very general rule, any feverish condition is likely to improve within 48 hours after starting a medication. Recording your horse's temperature may give you evidence that he is getting better even if other outward signs of illness remain unchanged—or it can provide an important indication that things are getting worse and you need to touch base with your veterinarian.

Call your veterinarian right away if your horse's fever climbs more than a degree higher than it was at the time of the initial visit or if it stays persistently at 102 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Also call your veterinarian if your horse's signs unexpectedly become more severe (some illnesses are known to get worse before they get better, and your veterinarian will alert you to this) or if any new signs develop. A horse who simply had a snotty nose when the veterinarian visited but is now coughing or stumbling may need to be seen again immediately.

POP QUIZ *Answer*

c. something he touched. The welts are most likely hives, which are soft, raised, rounded wheals on the skin caused by an allergic reaction. Hives "pit" under the pressure of your thumb and generally are not painful, although they may be itchy. The most common cause of hives in horses is a contact allergy—an immune overreaction to something that touched his skin, such as an ingredient in a new grooming product. Insect bites may also be the culprit but they are more likely to result in inflamed, itchy patches of skin.

On the other hand, hives caused by food allergies are rare in horses. If the swelling is nowhere near a horse's head or muzzle, hives require no treatment and will go away on their own. (But you'll need to figure out what triggered them so you can avoid causing additional, possibly more serious, allergic reactions in the future.) However, hives that affect a horse's vision or impinge on his airways may need to be addressed by a veterinarian, who will most likely administer corticosteroids to control the swelling.

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The case of the lost marbles

A routine exam reveals extensive uterine damage that resulted from a popular method to control estrus.

By Christine Barakat

It was time for a change. Delia, an 8-year-old Quarter Horse mare, had been successful in the show ring as a Western Pleasure horse, but now her owners were looking forward to breeding her and raising a foal. Their first step was to schedule a veterinary examination to ensure she was in good health.

"An exam is always a good idea before breeding a mare," says Regina Turner, VMD, PhD, of the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center. "Usually, they turn up nothing remarkable in a younger, maiden mare."

During the exam, Delia's veterinarian inserted a transrectal ultrasound probe to take a look at the mare's uterus. When it's empty, the equine uterus is small—you could cup it in your hand—so it doesn't take long to scan the entire organ.

"On ultrasound, the uterus should look all gray," says Turner. "But this veterinarian saw a bright, white circle, created by something spherical and dense enough that the ultrasound waves didn't pass through it but instead bounced right off."

Then the veterinarian noticed a second strange shape in Delia's uterus. This appeared to be another solid object, with at least one flattened, irregular surface. She removed the ultrasound probe and attempted to feel inside the mare's uterus with her hand. A mare's cervix, the opening to the uterus, can typically be penetrated with a single finger and carefully dilated manually to allow some access to the space. But on Delia's cervix, the veterinarian could feel only a mass of fibrous scar tissue, which effectively sealed the opening shut.



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These findings all pointed toward one scenario: Delia, the veterinarian said, most likely had a marble in her uterus and possibly a second, which had shattered.

Over the past decade, marbles have become popular for controlling estrus in mares. The small glass balls are sterilized and placed inside the uterus in an attempt to mimic an early pregnancy, "tricking" the mare's body into behaving as if she's in foal, and therefore preventing her from coming into heat.

As strange as it may sound, this can work—but only sometimes and only for short periods. Studies have shown that marbles suppress estrus in no more than 40 percent of mares for an average of 90 days. Still, this method of controlling a mare's cycle is appealing, especially to owners of horses in competition, because it does not require drugs and can be reversed after removing the marble.

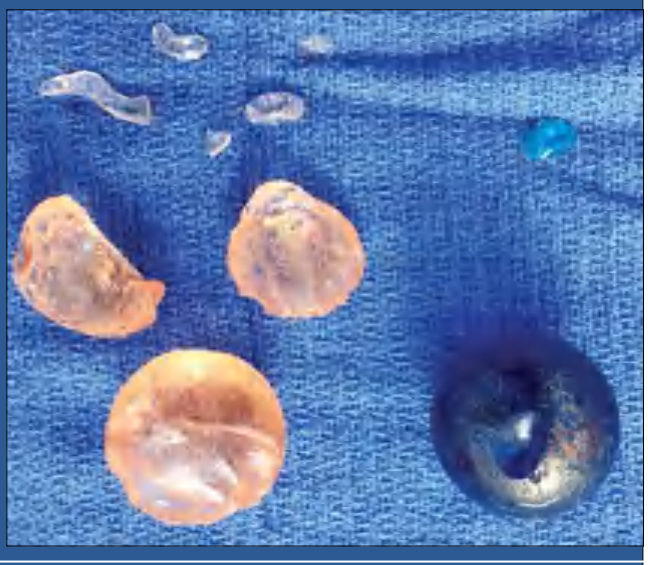
Delia's owners had not placed marbles in their mare. But when her previous owners were contacted, they confirmed that they had indeed placed one marble in, and then they added a second when the mare began to cycle again. "The previous owners probably assumed the first marble had been expelled," says Turner, "but from the looks of the ultrasound, it hadn't."

Inside the mare the two marbles had most likely struck each other repeatedly, causing one to crack and eventually break into pieces. Delia's veterinarian believed that the irregularly shaped object she'd seen on the ultrasound was probably a piece of the damaged marble, and the scarring of the cervix had resulted from injury caused when the uterus attempted to expel the sharp glass shards. Remarkably, Delia had never shown any signs of discomfort or discharge.

Still, this diagnosis was speculative. Unable to access the mare's uterus to either confirm the problem or rectify it, Delia's veterinarian referred her to New Bolton Center, where Turner took over the case.

Delia, the veterinarian said, most likely had a marble in her uterus and possibly a second, which had shattered.

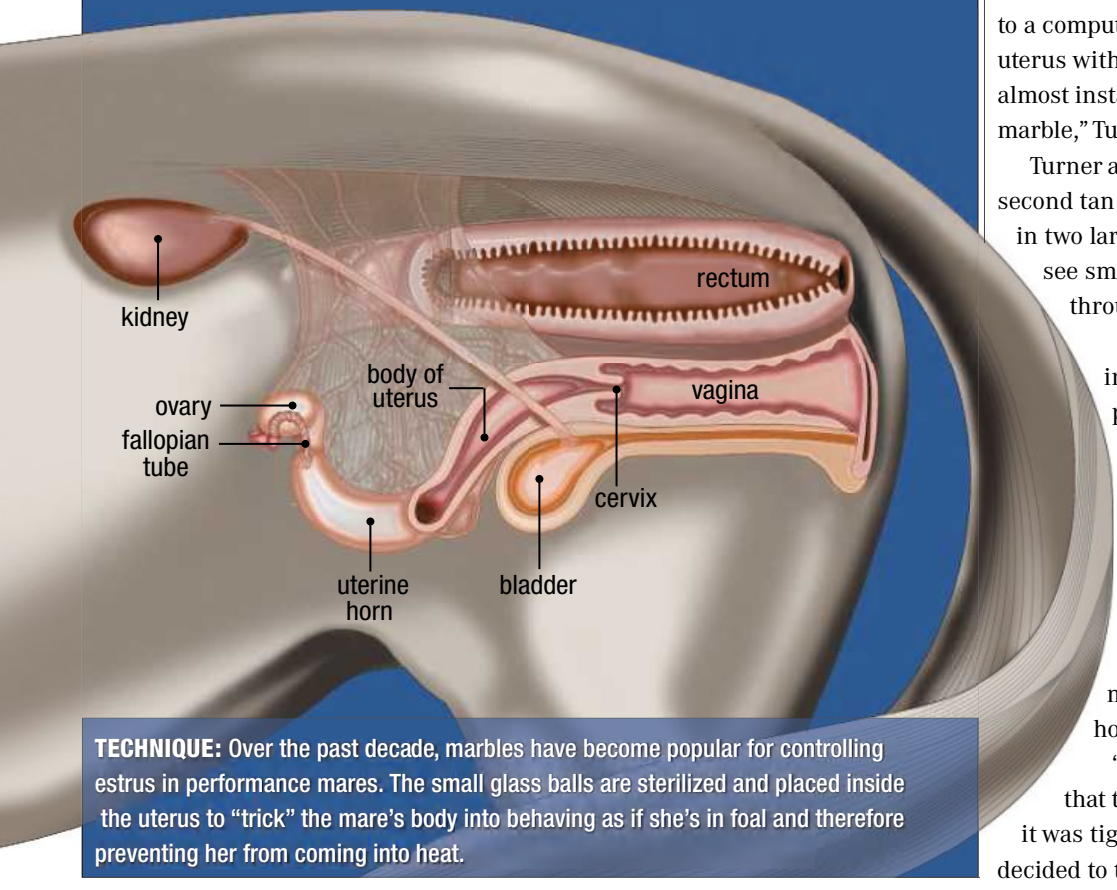
"Our first step was to perform an ultrasound to verify what the first



RETRIEVED: These marbles and fragments were removed from Delia's uterus. The blue one is largely intact with only one piece missing (seen above it in the image). The tan marble is shattered into multiple large and small pieces.

COURTESY, REGINA TURNER, VMD, PHD

A MARE'S ANATOMY



TECHNIQUE: Over the past decade, marbles have become popular for controlling estrus in performance mares. The small glass balls are sterilized and placed inside the uterus to "trick" the mare's body into behaving as if she's in foal and therefore preventing her from coming into heat.

veterinarian had seen," says Turner. "And that didn't take long. Within a few minutes we could see two distinct objects, one very round and the other irregularly shaped." Turner then carefully felt Delia's cervix and confirmed it was a mass of tight scar tissue.

"At that point, I tried to open the cervix manually, but that was very uncomfortable for the mare," says Turner. "So we stopped and sedated her so we could continue." The veterinary team also numbed the cervical area with a local anesthetic.

With Delia more comfortable, Turner began to manually break down the scar tissue at the cervix. "The goal was to get it open enough to insert an endoscope and get a direct look into the uterus. To break down the scar tissue, you have to stretch things very cautiously. It was a very slow process." Even working carefully, there was tissue tearing and bleeding. Delia, however, did not appear to be in any pain.

Cleanup job

Eventually, Delia's cervix was dilated enough to allow the insertion of a thin endoscope, a flexible tube with a light and a camera that relays an image back to a computer screen. "We inflated the uterus with air to get a good view, and almost instantly we saw it—a large, blue marble," Turner says.

Turner also saw the remains of a second tan marble: "It was broken in two larger pieces and we could see smaller shards of tan glass throughout the uterus."

The plan was to remove the intact marble and large glass pieces using an endoscopic snare, an instrument with a wire loop that can be pulled tight through a long handle. Guided by the endoscopic images, Turner and her colleagues snared and removed the larger pieces of the tan marble. The blue marble, however, presented a problem.

"The sides were so smooth that the snare just slipped off as it was tightened," she says. Turner decided to try another approach; she inserted one hand into the mare's rectum and kept the other at the opening of the cervix. She felt for the marble through the rectum wall, and once she located it, she pushed it along carefully to the waiting fingers of her other hand. "It was tricky," she says. "But ultimately, it worked."

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WARNINGS: Do not use in horses intended for human consumption.

HUMAN WARNINGS: Not for human use. Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. Consult a physician in case of accidental human exposure.

PRECAUTIONS: As a class, bisphosphonates may be associated with gastrointestinal and renal toxicity. Sensitivity to drug associated adverse reactions varies with the individual patient. Renal and gastrointestinal adverse reactions may be associated with plasma concentrations of the drug. Bisphosphonates are excreted by the kidney; therefore, conditions causing renal impairment may increase plasma bisphosphonate concentrations resulting in an increased risk for adverse reactions. Concurrent administration of other potentially nephrotoxic drugs should be approached with caution and renal function should be monitored. Use of bisphosphonates in patients with conditions or diseases affecting renal function is not recommended. Administration of bisphosphonates has been associated with abdominal pain (colic), discomfort, and agitation in horses. Clinical signs usually occur shortly after drug administration and may be associated with alterations in intestinal motility. In horses treated with OSPHOS these clinical signs usually began within 2 hours of treatment. Horses should be monitored for at least 2 hours following administration of OSPHOS.

Bisphosphonates affect plasma concentrations of some minerals and electrolytes such as calcium, magnesium and potassium, immediately post-treatment, with effects lasting up to several hours. Caution should be used when administering bisphosphonates to horses with conditions affecting mineral or electrolyte homeostasis (e.g. hyperkalemic periodic paralysis, hypocalcemia, etc.).

The safe use of OSPHOS has not been evaluated in horses less than 4 years of age. The effect of bisphosphonates on the skeleton of growing horses has not been studied; however, bisphosphonates inhibit osteoclast activity which impacts bone turnover and may affect bone growth.

Bisphosphonates should not be used in pregnant or lactating mares, or mares intended for breeding. The safe use of OSPHOS has not been evaluated in breeding horses or pregnant or lactating mares. Bisphosphonates are incorporated into the bone matrix, from where they are gradually released over periods of months to years. The extent of bisphosphonate incorporation into adult bone, and hence, the amount available for release back into the systemic circulation, is directly related to the total dose and duration of bisphosphonate use. Bisphosphonates have been shown to cause fetal developmental abnormalities in laboratory animals. The uptake of bisphosphonates into fetal bone may be greater than into maternal bone creating a possible risk for skeletal or other abnormalities in the fetus. Many drugs, including bisphosphonates, may be excreted in milk and may be absorbed by nursing animals.

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ADVERSE REACTIONS: The most common adverse reactions reported in the field study were clinical signs of discomfort or nervousness, colic and/or pawing. Other signs reported were lip licking, yawning, head shaking, injection site swelling, and hives/pruritus.

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Delia's cervix had relaxed and opened more, allowing Turner to carefully feel around for glass shards that hadn't been snared. "One of the pieces had embedded in the cervix, and I carefully squeezed it out of the tissues," she says. "That piece, and others like it, are what undoubtedly led to the scarring we had seen."

After they'd worked for an hour and a half to remove any pieces of glass they could see or feel, Turner took one more step to remove any additional small debris. "We flushed her uterus with a very large volume of saline to rinse out any tiny pieces," she says.

The team was able to reconstruct the broken marble with the recovered pieces, but still they couldn't be entirely certain they had gotten every one. "We can't say for sure that she doesn't still have glass shards embedded in her uterus," says Turner.

To prevent infection, Delia's uterus was flushed with antibiotics and an antibiotic cream was applied to her cervix. The mare recovered from her sedation, received a shot of Banamine to keep her comfortable and was shipped home the same day. Every two or three days for the following two weeks, the mare's veterinarian visited her to reapply antibiotic to her healing cervix.

Rethinking recommendations

Turner wrote about Delia for a veterinary journal, but the mare isn't an isolated or unique case, she says: "There is a listserv where reproductive veterinarians share information, and on that there have been a few reports of problems with marbles. One other mare had two marbles that hadn't shattered but had rubbed together enough that they filed down and produced glass shards. Another mare had a single marble that had broken."

Veterinarians also report failure of the marbles entirely. "There have been mares that have become pregnant with the marbles in place," says Turner. "They delivered a foal and a marble. Other mares have gotten pregnant with the marbles in place and then aborted. We don't know if the marble caused the abortion, but it's worth noting."

Owners who want to try using marbles to control estrus in a mare need to be aware of the risks, says Turner: "If you're going to use them, make sure there's only one in there. You can confirm that with an ultrasound. But even using one marble might not be safe. They typically are autoclaved to make them sterile before they are inserted. That's a high-heat process that might make the marbles more fragile."

Turner says it's possible that plastic or metal balls could have the same effect without the risk of breaking, but they may introduce other problems. "They could be retained for years and forgotten, especially if a mare is sold, eventually leading to infections that are difficult to diagnose and treat," she says.

Among most veterinarians specializing in reproduction, however, the general recommendation is to not use the marble method at all, says Turner: "The consensus is that there are much better options than this. There are progesterone or oxytocin injections or altrenogest given orally. We know all of these work well and are safe."

Delia was bred once after the marble pieces were removed from her uterus, but she did not settle into foal. "This one attempt isn't enough to say that she's never going to be able to become pregnant," says Turner. "But it is possible that the glass has done some permanent damage and she has no future as a broodmare." Delia's owners, however, are happy to keep their sweet-tempered mare, even without a foal at her side. They've made no further attempts to breed her and have returned her to the Western Pleasure ring.

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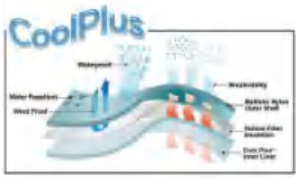
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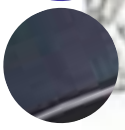
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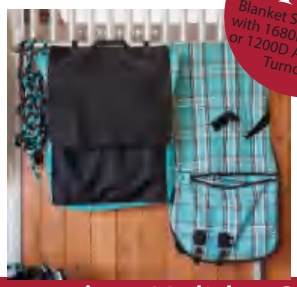
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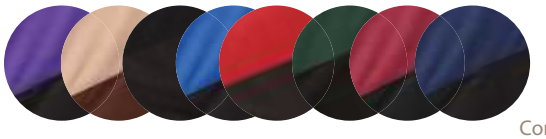
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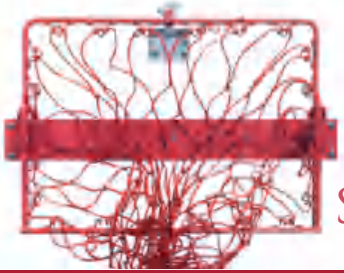


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How to deal with footwork failures

By Jonathan Field
Photos by Robin Duncan

When a horse resists having his hooves handled, he poses a threat to his handler's safety as well as his own. But with some simple exercises, he can be taught to accept farriery work.

Q: *My 12-year-old rescue gelding is very sensitive to having work done on his feet. I don't know if he was hurt at some point in his life, but he appears to be particularly fearful about having work done on his back feet. I'm able to lift, handle and pick all four hooves, and I do this with him on a daily basis. But when the farrier arrives, it's a different story. My gelding allows his front feet to be trimmed with a bit of coaxing and patience. But when it comes to his back feet, he fights so fiercely that I'm forced to sedate him for the farrier's safety and his own. He's barefoot for now, because the thought of shoeing him seems a little daunting until we've gotten past his aversion to having his hooves worked on. Eventually, I'd prefer to not have to sedate him, use a twitch or any other form of restraint when his feet are being tended to. What can I do to work toward this?*

Great question—and I particularly like the fact that you do as much as you can between trims to help your farrier. You're definitely right about the steps involved. Don't try for shoes until this horse accepts handling and trimming. I assume you have had your veterinarian examine this horse to make sure he



does not have a physical or neurological problem that makes work on his rear hooves uncomfortable or painful.

There is no quick fix when it comes to teaching a horse to allow handling of his legs. After all, legs have everything to do with flight and survival. That means it takes a lot of trust for a prey animal to accept a person confining one, even though we don't mean any harm and we will give the leg back in a minute or so. Horses who have had a tough past are especially wary.

At a clinic a few years ago I was asked to help with a gelding who had a similar problem. He was a 5-year-old buckskin, and when people tried to handle his hind legs he was explosively dangerous. When the lady asked me to help her, she didn't give me much history. She just said her horse had "hind leg issues." I approached the horse, let him sniff me, and then began rubbing my way down his body. He was standing dead quiet. Rather then go for the hind legs directly I picked up his forelegs, which he allowed with no problem. Noticing he had hind shoes, I figured his "hind leg issues" couldn't be too bad. Standing as close to the shoulder as I could, to stay out of the kick zone, I gave a rub down his side. I could feel his belly muscles tighten, and as I approached his flank he let out three lighting-fast kicks as if to say, "Don't even try it, Cowboy!"

There is no quick fix when it comes to teaching a horse to allow handling of his legs. After all, legs have everything to do with flight and survival.

At that point, I got the whole story about how three guys fought with this horse for four hours to get those hind shoes on. The woman told me the men had tied up the gelding's legs, laid him down and beat him to get the job done. It was a horrible experience, and he wasn't about to let it happen again. In the end it took me three days to build up his trust to the point where I could easily pick up his hind feet, simulate rasp strokes and tap lightly to prepare for nailing on shoes. The lady kept it up and he has since had hind shoes on without a struggle.

Fortunately, most horses don't have that level of aversion to hind-leg handling, but many make the process more difficult than it needs to be for all concerned. And the steps involved in helping them improve are pretty much the same.

Safety is the main concern. Be realistic about your skill level and don't overface yourself and get hurt. If the horse you are dealing with is even close to the level of difficulty posed by the buckskin gelding I described, get some professional, hands-on help.

When working with any horse, you must be able to read the subtle signs. When I worked my way down the belly of that buckskin with my hand, he was already telling me, "I do not like what is going on." If I had ignored his message and headed straight for the hind legs, I could have been caught by those kicks he had ready for me.

So, reading the horse is key, and spotting tension is your main focus. Make sure he gets in the right state of



1 Using my horse, Jack, I will demonstrate some steps that can be used to teach a horse to allow work on his hooves. First, to build trust, I want to show Jack that things touching his legs won't hurt him. Before I use my hands, I rub his legs with sticks, flags and even objects like pool noodles. While standing close to his shoulder, I bend Jack's head toward me. I want to be able to pull his nose to me so his hindquarters are oriented the other way if he gets irritated and tries to kick out.



2. I pick up Jack's legs with a rope. Don't pull the rope snugly around the hoof but rather hold both ends and just loop it down around the pastern and back to you. Think of the rope as an extension of your arm. You want to place it where you would put your hand to ask to pick up a hoof. I also do lots of rubbing with the rope so he realizes that the contact is nothing to fear. I don't grip the rope tightly or try to jerk or confine the leg. The idea is to avoid triggering the horse's fight mode. I tell people it's a little bit like holding a bird; your grasp needs to be tight enough to keep him but not so tight that you suffocate him.



3. I like to walk the horse forward and let the rope follow—and even feel like it is leading the hoof a bit. This way, if there is tension and worry, the horse can walk it off with a rope touching his leg.



4. Before going for the legs, rub your way down the body, while remaining alert for signs that the horse is worried—such as tense muscles or a swishing tail.



5. Now it's time to hold the leg and give it a rub. With Jack's head bent toward me and the rope over my lap, I try to stand close to his shoulder and as far out of the kick zone as possible.



6. This is the hands-free position. Once your horse will allow you to lift his hooves, build up to holding them for longer periods of time, similar to the amount your farrier will need. Don't hold the hoof for two seconds and then drop it back—this will teach him to be impatient with your farrier. Here I lightly and rhythmically tap on Jack's hoof to simulate the pounding of a nail.

mind before you go to handle his legs. The slightest signs of tension can show up with a skin twitch, fidgeting, irritation or general resistance. Pay attention to any signs of trouble through the whole process.

If, as you work with a horse, you start to feel him get agitated, ask him to move. The goal is to direct his energy through controlled movement. If he won't stand still to relax, then move him more. Keep in mind, it is a horseman's feel and timing that will get a horse through this. You determine when you are going to move him or go back to the leg handling based on his state of mind. If he feels trapped or forced he has to fight. By moving him you cause him to make this choice: He can stand still and relax while you quietly handle his legs or he can do a lot of moving.

Never miss a chance to prepare your horse for leg handling. Whenever the farrier comes to my barn I like to bring my young horses around to experience all the sights and sounds. This way they become OK with it while nothing is happening with them. My farrier will often take a short



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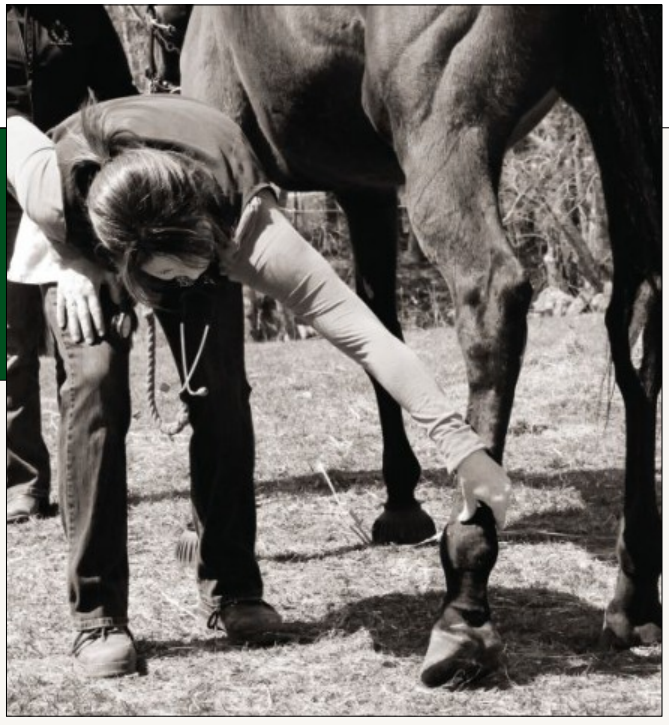


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• When working with a horse who has leg-handling issues, I use a large arena that has good footing. This way if the horse needs to move, I can move him. Don't attempt to do these training sessions in a barn aisle or tie stall.

• Before each session, exercise your horse for at least 20 minutes to release any pent-up energy and emotion. He'll probably be in the best frame of mind after a long ride.

• Stay out of the kick zones as much as you can during the process of desensitization and trust building. Stand as close to the horse's shoulder as possible, to avoid a cow-style kick from the horse.

• If you have a handler on the horse's head, make sure that person knows how to help you stay safe. I tend to want to control the nose myself so I can direct the trajectory of the hindquarters. I want to be able to pull the nose toward me, which causes the hindquarters to swing away from me.

• Divide the process into steps and allow as much time as it takes to master each element before moving on to the next step. Remember that even if you do everything right, you are still holding a hind leg on a horse that can kick and hurt you. You may move through all the steps and still have a horse who is dangerous to handle. It is the horseman's feel and timing that gets through these issues to a positive resolution. If you are in over your head, call in someone experienced to help your horse over this.

• If you pick up a hoof and the horse begins to struggle too much, let it go, move him around and take a fresh start. Make sure the first step you ask of him is to move the hindquarters away from you.

• When holding up a hoof, never put your fingers over the end—this will prevent your fingers from getting caught and injured if the horse slams the foot to the ground.

• Ease back into contact after a break. If you are touching the leg and then let it go, start over by touching his body somewhere else first and then rub your way back to the leg. Sometimes when you break contact and then try to touch a horse again on the same spot on his leg, he will react as if you've just come from nowhere. I have seen horses instantly kick out, even though the handler was just touching them a few moments ago.

• Make repetition work for you. When it comes to horses, many things can be overdone, but these techniques require lots of repetition. I like to repeat many of these steps in sessions of 15 minutes each. Then do three of these short sessions a day for several days. Continue for at least 14 days and maybe many more. It depends on the horse and how comfortable he becomes.

DUSTY PERIN

break and come over and give them a friendly rub so they think she is OK, too. Then, by the time she needs to work on them, they already know her.

In the end my goal is for horses to allow anyone, in any area, to pick up and handle their hooves for cleaning, doctoring, trimming, rasping, nailing and even hot shoeing. With my young horses I focus on these basics and include them in every session. If I'm riding, for example, each time I dismount I walk around and pick up all four hooves and hold them for a bit. When possible, I simulate rasp strokes and even the pounding of the nails by tapping their hooves with my hands. All of this helps to make farrier work and other handling easier for them down the road.

About the author: Jonathan Field is a trainer and clinician from Abbotsford, British Columbia. His program, Jonathan Field Horsemanship: Inspired by Horses, teaches the skills necessary to build a relationship with horses. Field grew up riding both English and Western and worked as a cowboy on one of the largest cattle ranches in Canada. Field regularly does presentations at events like the Western States Horse Expo in Sacramento, California. His first book, *The Art of Liberty Training for Horses,* was published in 2014.



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10 ways to help horses with HEAVES



You can play a vital role in protecting your horse's respiratory health by making these simple and easy management changes.

By Heather Smith Thomas

Although a "wait and see" approach may be appropriate for some conditions that affect horses, heaves isn't one of them. Of course, a horse in the midst of a flare-up needs immediate help but even one whose heaves are under control requires vigilant care.

Technically known as recurrent airway obstruction (RAO), heaves is respiratory inflammation caused by the inhalation of the types of molds, dusts or pollens often found in barns and around farms. But RAO is much more than just irritation of the lungs—it's a chronic inflammatory lung disease caused by hypersensitivity to organic particles within the inhaled dust.

"Horses with heaves experience airway inflammation and bronchoconstriction due to an allergy-like reaction to some factor in the environment," says Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, DVM, MS, DACVIM, of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine in Blacksburg, Virginia. "In this way, heaves is similar to human asthma, which is a disease caused by an allergy to certain antigens or irritants in a person's environment." And like asthma, heaves can have vastly different effects. In its mild form, heaves may result in an occasional cough and/or the intermittent expulsion of mucus. But a horse with severe heaves, in the midst of an "episode" or "flare-up," has to work hard simply to breathe, even when standing at rest.

By the time a horse is showing outward signs of respiratory distress, the ongoing inflammation and immune reactivity are fairly severe. This does not mean that the disease is irreversible. It is simply an indication that it's time to make drastic changes in the horse's environment and to initiate treatment so the horse can return to a normal breathing

PAULA DA SILVA/ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY

pattern. Otherwise, he will become uncomfortable and spend a lot of extra effort and energy just trying to breathe. Three major factors contribute to the horse's difficult breathing:

• **Bronchoconstriction:** The smooth muscle that surrounds the airways of the lung tightens, narrowing the passageways. If the muscle remains tight for a prolonged period it begins to "remodel" so that it becomes enlarged or "hypertrophic." The increase in muscle makes it easier for the airways to constrict, and this becomes a cycle that is hard to break without intervention and treatment.

• **Inflammation:** The buildup of neutrophils[0] and other pro-inflammatory substances can lead to prolonged tissue swelling and fluid accumulation that inhibits the functioning of the small airways.

• **Mucus buildup:** The type of inflammation caused by neutrophils stimulates the overproduction of thicker, stickier mucus than is found in normal horses.

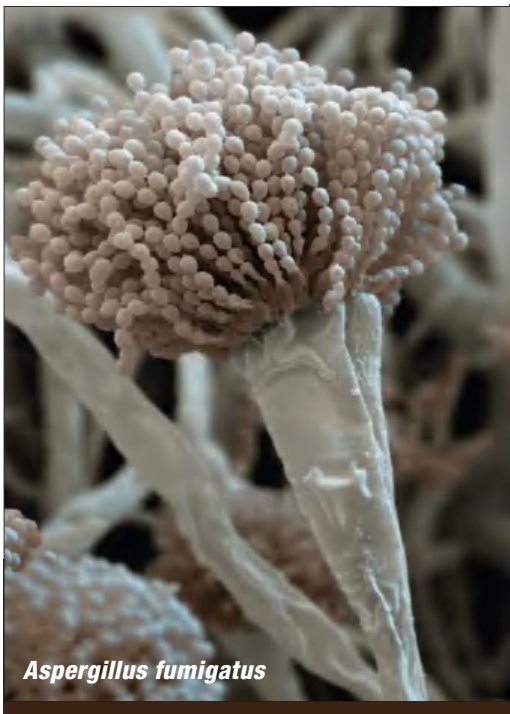
Once a horse has developed RAO, he will always be more susceptible to flare-ups when he encounters even small amounts of the substances that affect him. "I explain it to horse owners by comparing this to human allergies," says Laurent L. Couetil, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, of Purdue University. "If you are severely allergic to cats, a few cat hairs may cause as much reaction as the whole cat. If you walk into a room where there was a cat, you can tell—because you respond to it. Some horses are very sensitive to dusts containing mold, just as some people are very sensitive to cat allergens, and just a little bit is enough to trigger the reaction."

Fortunately, says Amy Johnson, DVM, DACVIM, of the University of Pennsylvania, "as far as diseases go, this one is fairly easy to deal with because even though we don't yet fully understand everything about why RAO happens, treatment and management protocols have been fairly well established. We know what works. It's not a controversial disease."

And that's where your efforts can make all the difference. Although your veterinarian will likely prescribe anti-inflammatories and/or bronchodilators to counter the physiological effects of heaves, management rather than medication is often the key to helping a horse recover. Couetil has seen this firsthand: "Over the years I've probably had about 100 horses donated to me because they couldn't be managed adequately to prevent heaves, but I've only had two that needed medication once in a while because respiratory problems would flare up. The rest have done fine just with our management, with no medication. They live at the farm, and when they are not in a study they are outdoors 24-7 with just a shelter in their pasture. They are fed a complete pelleted feed during the winter when there is not enough grass."

Once a horse has developed heaves, he will always be more susceptible to flare-ups when he encounters even small amounts of the substances that affect him.

Your best advisor for addressing your horse's particular situation is, of course, your veterinarian. And you may need to do a little detective work to identify elements in a horse's environment most likely to trigger RAO. But, to help you get started, we've compiled a list of the measures most commonly recommended to reduce the stress on horses with heaves.



EYE OF SCIENCE/SCIENCE SOURCE.COM

Aspergillus fumigatus

MOLD, MOLD, EVERYWHERE: The spores of *Aspergillus fumigatus,* a mold commonly found in hays, are thought to be a primary trigger of recurrent airway obstruction, but other types of mold, dust mites, bacterial endotoxins and other organic particles may also play a role. Different horses may respond to different specific triggers.



DENNIS KUNKEL MICROSCOPY/VISUALS UNLIMITED

Aspergillus versicolor

HORSES WITH HEAVES

1. WET YOUR HAY



Dry hay is one of the primary sources of dust and mold spores that cause RAO. And the issue isn't just with "moldy hay."

"What is difficult for people to understand is that good quality hay can be a problem," Couetil says. "They realize that moldy hay is bad, but they think their hay is good. But there is still some dust—and some mold spores—in good quality hay. It's generally a question of how much. Once the horse is sensitive to molds, a breathing problem can be triggered even by good quality hay. We have studies going on right now to demonstrate this. The same molds can be found in good hay, just not as many."

Wetting down hay prior to feeding has long been a tried-and-true way to reduce the levels of dusts and molds a horse inhales while eating. The amount of water needed depends on the horse's level of sensitivity. "It's really a spectrum; some of the mildly affected horses can tolerate even dry hay, as long as they are fed outside," says Johnson, and for some horses, simply wetting the hay with a hose will be enough. For extremely sensitive horses, however, it may be necessary to submerge the hay in a trough or bucket to soak it thoroughly.

DUSTY PERIN

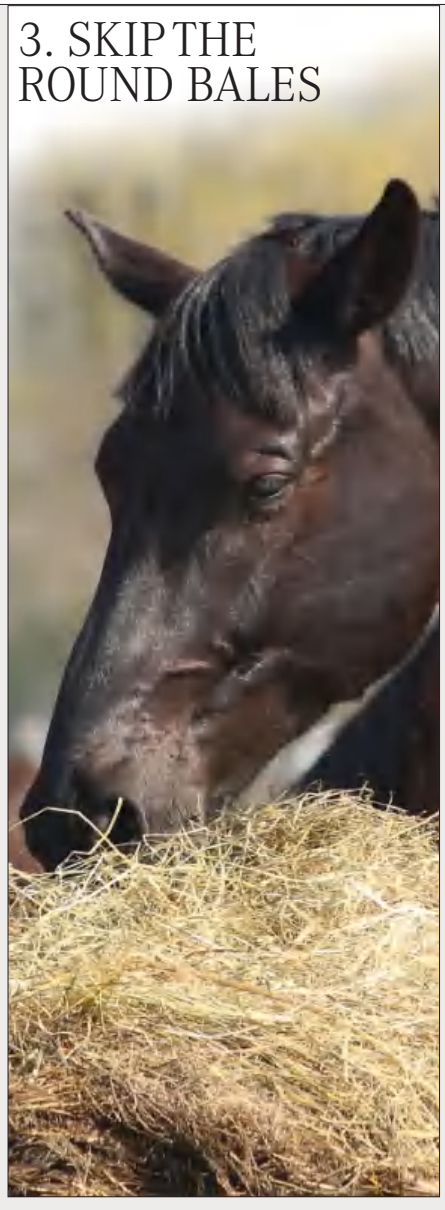
2. STEAM YOUR HAY



Steaming is a newer option for treating hay. Hay steamers are available from several manufacturers, sized to steam whole bales, half bales, and individual portions. "When considering a steamer, select one that gets the core temperature of the hay up to 212 degrees Fahrenheit; this eliminates or greatly reduce the microbes. You are not just adding moisture to the hay, but also reducing the load of molds and fungi which are considered some of the primary causative agents of equine heaves," says Buechner-Maxwell, who recently conducted a study to assess the value of steaming hay. She found that RAO horses who were fed steamed hay had reduced respiratory signs than they did when fed untreated hay.

Steamers may require some care and preparation. "The process produces a small volume of runoff water that can be directed into a drain through a hose. In climates where temperatures drop below freezing in winter, the steamer will also need to be kept in a heated environment to avoid freezing or the water will need to be drained from the system between uses," says Buechner-Maxwell. "Even though steaming takes a little extra effort, owners report that feeding their heavey horses steamed hay reduces or eliminates the need to maintain them long-term on medications like corticosteroids."

3. SKIP THE ROUND BALES



Many heavey horses kept on pasture have access to round bales, which could exacerbate their respiratory condition. "Round bales have higher levels of endotoxins, dusts and molds compared to other forage sources," explains Johnson. "People think the horse will be fine just because it is outside, on pasture, and then wonder why he isn't getting better—and it's because the horse is sticking his nose into a round bale and breathing the dust."

ANASTASIJA POPOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

4. SWITCH TO PELLETS



INGA SPENCE/VISUALS UNLIMITED

Sometimes even soaking hay isn't enough, says Johnson: "A few horses still inhale enough particles/allergens from wet hay to trigger the disease, and must be taken off hay entirely." She recommends that those horses receive cubed hay or a complete pelleted ration with no loose forage at all.

5. INCREASE TURNOUT TIME



Most horses with RAO do best turned out 24-7 on nondusty pasture. "If that's not possible," says Johnson, "then the horse should be in a stall that has the least exposure to these particles in the air the horse is breathing." Of course, for horses with summer-pasture associated RAO, which is triggered by allergens produced by pasture plants, the best option may be to remain in the barn during the summer months. Either way, the dust levels in the interior environment need to be as low as possible.

6. MOVE YOUR HORSE TO A DIFFERENT STALL



MIDDLE: DUSTY PERIN FRANK SORGE/ ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY

Choice of stall is one of the first considerations when placing a heavey horse in the barn—you want a location with maximum ventilation, well away from any sources of dust, such as an attached indoor arena or a hay storage area. "Make sure the most airflow is away from any storage stall or area where bales of straw or hay might be located," says Johnson. "The worst barns are the ones with an overhead hayloft, with particles raining down from the ceiling." A corner stall next to an exterior door that can be left open year-round is a good choice.

7. SWITCH TO A DIFFERENT TYPE OF BEDDING



FRANK SORGE/ ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY

Stall bedding is also an important consideration. Straw is among the worst choices, says Johnson, because it molds readily and can retain dust: "It pays to try to find a low-dust bedding. We use chopped paper or cardboard bedding for these horses at our hospital. Sawdust is also better than straw. Pellets over stall mats also work pretty well."

Changing the bedding in just one stall won't fix the problem if the horses in the adjacent stalls are still stirring up their straw. "The whole barn has to be managed to minimize dust," says Buechner-Maxwell. Nonetheless, if you are boarding a heavey horse, it's worthwhile to make changes in his stall to try to prevent a flare-up.

8. CLEAR THE BARN WHEN IT'S CLEANING TIME



Remove your heavey horse, if not every horse, from the barn before sweeping the aisles or doing other chores that churn up dirt. "Cleaning the stalls in the barn generates a lot of dust," says Couetil. "Even during the winter, if you can take the horse out of the barn while you are cleaning and re-bedding the stalls, this will help. It has been shown in our lab and in other labs that it takes at least an hour for the dust to settle down after cleaning the barn. Wait at least that long before you bring horses back in." The same goes for sweeping the aisle or using a leaf blower; remove the horses before doing either.

But don't skimp on cleaning chores. "I've found in some cases that there are additional irritating factors," says Buechner-Maxwell. "If you dig under the stall bedding and find a lot of ammonia, this can be a problem, too. I tell clients to get down on their hands and knees and stick their heads down where the horse does."

9. MAKE SURE YOUR BARN IS WELL VENTILATED



CLIX PHOTOGRAPHY

If ammonia smells and dusty air are chronic problems in your barn, you may need to improve the ventilation throughout the structure. The solution may be as simple as setting up fans or opening windows or doors, even in winter, to allow air to be drawn through each stall. A contractor experienced with modern barns may also be able to recommend inexpensive fixes, such as installing soffit or ridge vents or cupolas, to improve airflow. All of your horses will benefit from the cleaner air.

MIDDLE: ARND BRONKHORST

10. ADD AN OMEGA-3 FATTY ACID SUPPLEMENT



JANICE TREMPER

In human medicine, omega-3 fatty acids are used to help manage a variety of inflammatory conditions, and recently Couetil published a study suggesting that horses with heaves may benefit from them as well. In his double-blind trial, the clinical signs of horses with heaves who received supplemental omega-3 fatty acids showed significant improvement compared to horses who did not receive the supplement. "People started using these for coronary heart disease, and now for arthritis and asthma," says Couetil. "In horses, this is the first study done with an algae source of omega-3 fatty acid, and it was the first one to show an effect. So now I recommend this to my clients as an alternative, as a drug-free supplement."



DUSTY PERIN

TAKE A DEEP BREATH: A nebulizer vaporizes liquid medication and delivers it into a mask that covers the horse's muzzle.

BREATHING IT IN

Inhaled medications are an effective way to deliver treatment directly into the airways of horses with recurrent airway obstruction. Indeed, this mode of delivery may be the best option for horses who need low doses of medications to keep the airway inflammation under control over the long term. "If you have a horse who needs more than just environmental changes, we suggest an aerosolized medication as a maintenance therapy," says Johnson. "This involves a big up-front cost, but in the long term the horses benefit enough that it is worthwhile. Most horses tolerate these devices pretty well, but once in a while we find one that wants nothing to do with it." Two basic types of inhalation devices are available:

- *Inhalers* use metered dose inhalers (MDIs) to deliver a drug via a miniature aerosol can, much like those used with human patients. To administer this to a horse, the MDI is attached to a chamber with a nose piece or mask that can be placed over one or both of the horse's nostrils. When the MDI is activated, it "puffs" a dose of medication into the chamber, which is then inhaled by the horse. The horse may need to be acclimated to the sound of the MDI as well as the mask or cup. The Equinehaler and AeroHippus are the more common models available in the United States.

"Administering medications by metered dose delivery can be done fairly quickly once the horse gets used to the process. However, the medications can be expensive. If the long-term cost of providing metered dose medication is a financial burden for the owner, nebulization provides another option for delivering inhaled medications that generally are less expensive in the long term," says Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, DVM, MS, DACVIM, of the Virginia–Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine.

- *Nebulizers* are electric- or battery-powered devices that vaporize liquid medications and deliver them into a mask that covers the horse's muzzle; they can also be used with MDIs. One of the newer ones on the market is called the Flexineb. "When clients can afford this, it is the product I recommend," says Buechner-Maxwell. "All of the material for nebulization is contained within the mask. It also delivers a very consistent mist and most horses tolerate the mask well once they are used to it. In many cases, owners can place the mask on the horse and then work nearby in the barn until the medication has been delivered and it's time to remove the device."

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TIME-TESTED MEDICATION OPTIONS

During a flare-up of recurrent airway obstruction (RAO), a combination of drugs may provide relief. "You need to get rid of the inflammation with the steroids, and then treat with a bronchodilator to open the air passages that are squeezed shut," says Amy Johnson, DVM, DACVIM, of the University of Pennsylvania. "For an acute episode, we usually recommend systemic steroids administered either intravenously or in the muscle, or even orally, and bronchodilators."

Clenbuterol (Ventipulmin) and ipratropium are the two bronchodilators most commonly prescribed for horses, and they are usually administered along with the corticosteroids dexamethasone and prednisolone. This drug protocol has been in use for a long time and is generally considered safe. "If the horse has a very severe, acute problem, dexamethasone is the way to go," says Laurent L. Couetil, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, of Purdue University. "People worry about laminitis when using steroids, and certainly if you have a horse that has foundered previously, there is more risk. But otherwise it is a very safe drug. I've had many horses on dexamethasone over the years and have yet to see one founder. We usually treat them for four or five days with a high dose, to give relief and get them comfortable quickly. Then I switch them to oral prednisolone, and the dose can be decreased over time."

The corticosteroids are available in inhaled as well as oral or injectable forms; clenbuterol is available as an oral syrup; ipratropium must be inhaled. The oral and injectable medications tend to be cheaper and easier to administer. Inhaled medications require the use of a device—either a nebulizer or an inhaler and mask—that covers one or both of a horse's nostrils; when a vaporized form of the drug is inserted into the device, the horse breathes it in. Two general types of nebulizers and inhalers are available on the market (see "Breathing It In," page 48). Typically, a horse might need to be acclimated to the mask and the process.

"The aerosolized bronchodilators seem to work more quickly than the oral medication," says Johnson. "An aerosolized bronchodilator has been shown to improve lung function significantly within about five minutes, and the oral drugs can't act that quickly."

Steroids in pill form are often prescribed but they are also available in an inhaled form. "Dexamethasone works very well in a nebulizer, but the problem is that it is also well absorbed in the lungs, so if you are worried about laminitis, the risk is no different than giving it in the vein or giving it orally. It doesn't really decrease the side effects," says Couetil, who prefers intravenous use for acute episodes of RAO. "If a horse is in crisis, having a hard time breathing, there is nothing better than IV dexamethasone to give relief. It will give the quickest response."

Another corticosteroid that can be used with an inhaler is fluticasone. "This is a human drug and expensive, but works very well," says Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, DVM, MS, DACVIM, of the Virginia–Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine in Blacksburg, Virginia. "I've used it in my own horses, and it's a safe and effective way to control heaves without exposing their whole body to high levels of corticosteroids." Studies that have compared the "whole body" effect of administering either oral prednisolone or inhaled fluticasone to RAO horses have shown that inhaled fluticasone is very effective with fewer side effects when compared to medications like oral prednisolone. If the cost is within the owner's budget, providing inhaled fluticasone is a safer long-term treatment option for RAO horses.

Heaves is never cured. The management changes needed to care for a horse prone to RAO are lifelong. "Many horses have no clinical signs once they get out on pasture and away from the dust of a barn and hay," Johnson says. "They don't need any drugs for years and years. They are fine as long as they stay away from allergens in the hay/dust." But if they are returned to a dusty environment, they will soon be coughing and wheezing again.

Yet that does not mean the horse cannot live a long, useful life. "I had a horse that was diagnosed with heaves when he was 7, and he finally passed away at age 37," says Buechner-Maxwell. "He was still out in the hunt field at age 24. Many can live a long time and do really well, with proper care, if you don't give up on them. I have adopted five of my research horses, and all of them lived well into their 20s. Of the three that remain, two are in their late 20s and one is over 30. If you visited my farm, I doubt you could pick them out from the rest of the horses."

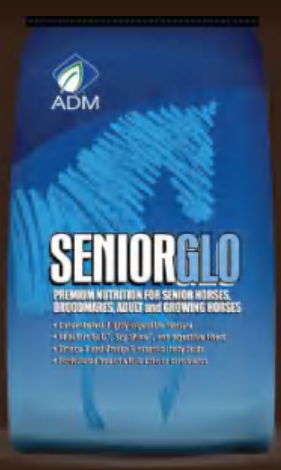
Diligence with the management changes needed to control heaves isn't always easy, but it is the key to a heavey horse's long-term health. "I can't emphasize enough how important the environment is and the fact that you could be innovative and may be able to make a difference for that horse," Buechner-Maxwell says.

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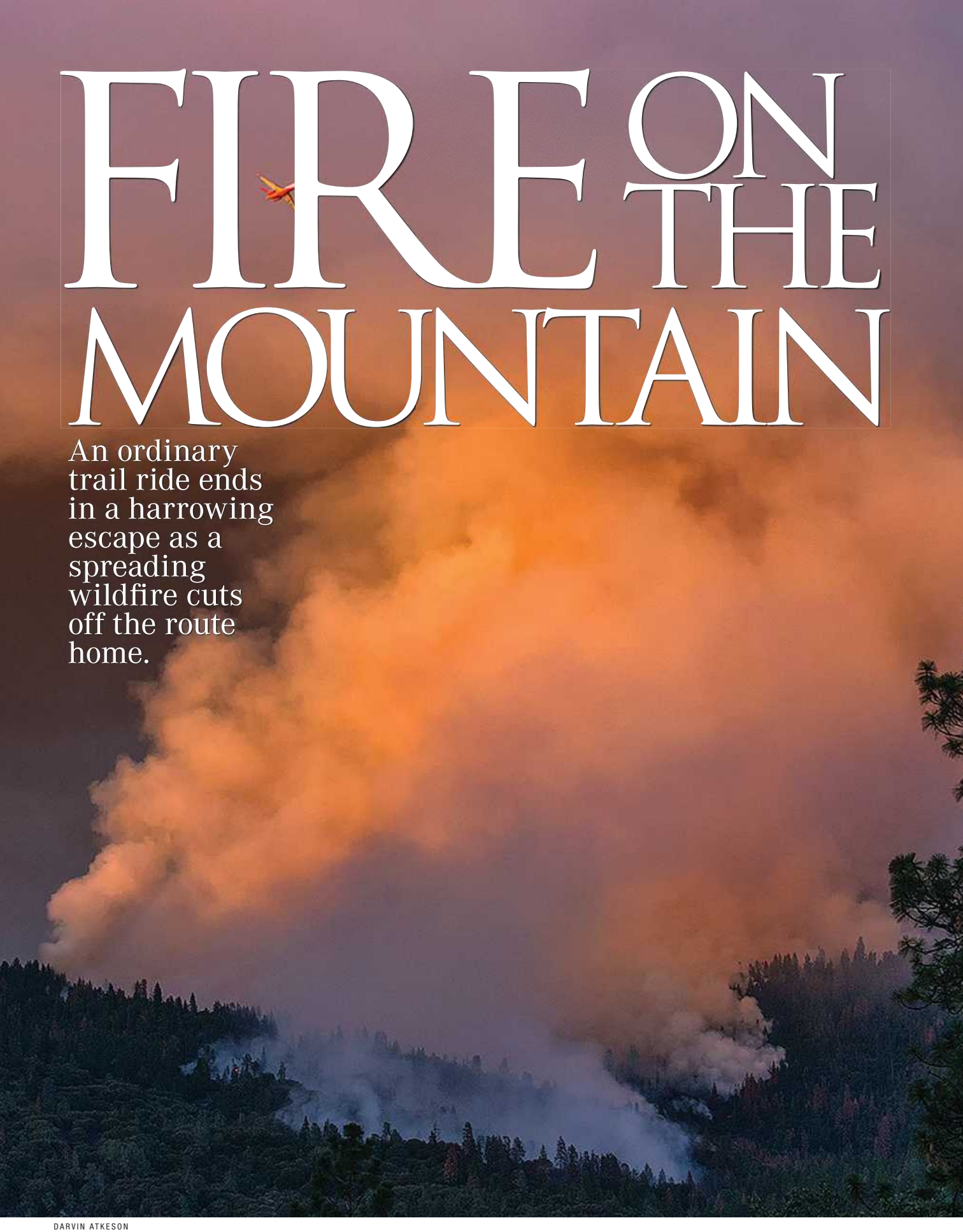
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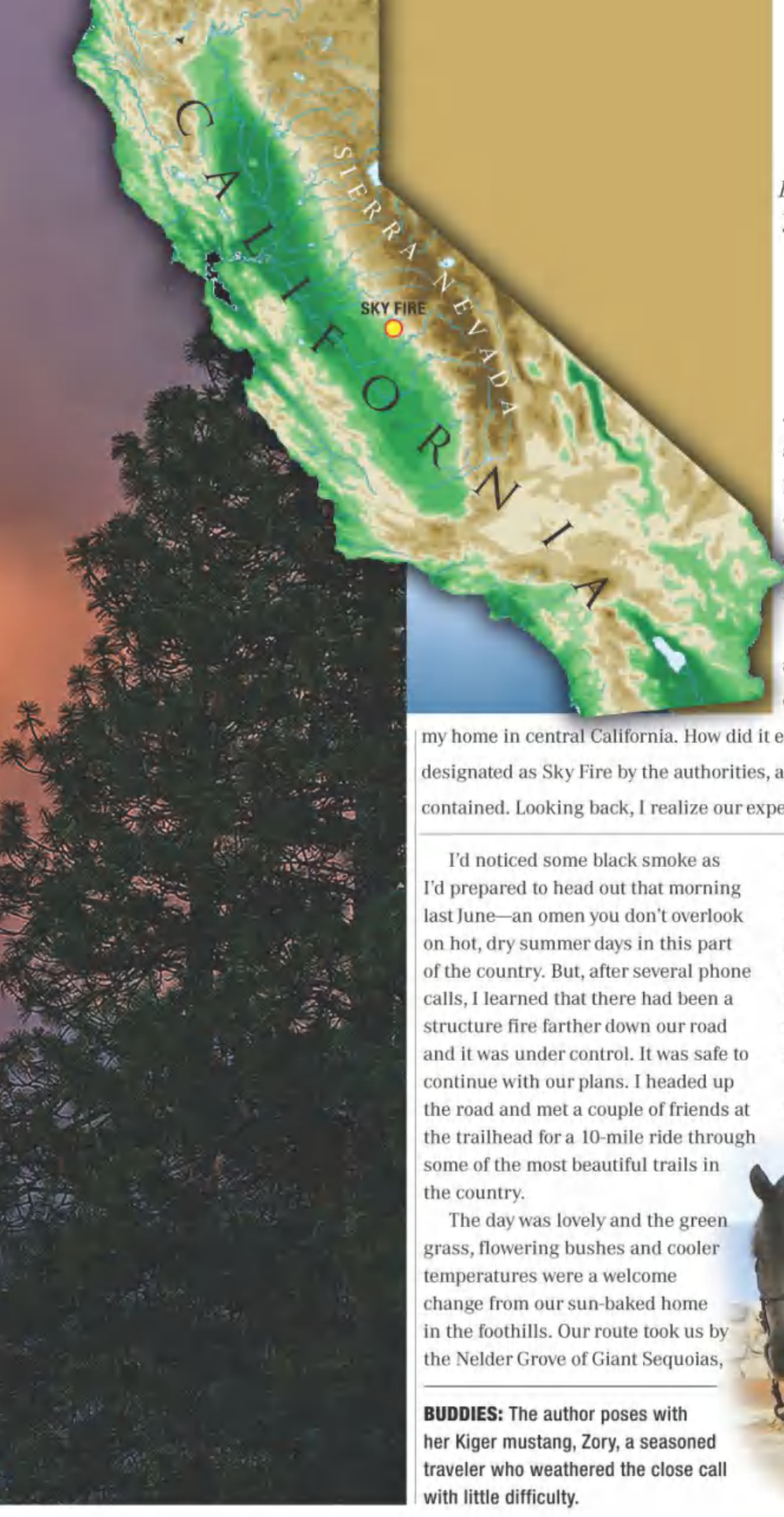
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FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

An ordinary trail ride ends in a harrowing escape as a spreading wildfire cuts off the route home.



DARVIN ATKESON



CALIFORNIAMAP.ORG

By Cindy Casey

I was hungry and tired, and I wanted to be home. The dusty dirt road seemed to never end, and my windshield wipers had to constantly push away the dust to allow me a view of the trailer just ahead. I could only wonder how my horse, Zory, was faring in the trailer behind me, after bouncing through ruts and over rocks hour after hour.

The day had started with a pleasant ride in the Sierra Nevada Forest, on trails about an hour's drive from my home in central California. How did it end this way? The cause was a wildfire, designated as Sky Fire by the authorities, and it affected 500 acres before it was contained. Looking back, I realize our experience could have been far worse.

I'd noticed some black smoke as I'd prepared to head out that morning last June—an omen you don't overlook on hot, dry summer days in this part of the country. But, after several phone calls, I learned that there had been a structure fire farther down our road and it was under control. It was safe to continue with our plans. I headed up the road and met a couple of friends at the trailhead for a 10-mile ride through some of the most beautiful trails in the country.

The day was lovely and the green grass, flowering bushes and cooler temperatures were a welcome change from our sun-baked home in the foothills. Our route took us by the Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoias, and as we passed the enormous Bull Buck Tree, a giant sequoia with a diameter of more than 26 feet, one of my companions remarked that this tree had been there long before us and would be there long after us. Thinking of the severe drought we are experiencing I commented, "I hope so."

After our ride, we returned to the trailhead, took the tack off our horses



COURTESY, CINDY CASEY

BUDDIES: The author poses with her Kiger mustang, Zory, a seasoned traveler who weathered the close call with little difficulty.

and started for home. It had been a wonderful trip. But that was about to change. The fire I'd noticed earlier would turn out to be the first of five that would break out in the nearby mountain communities that day, and one of them was now growing out of control.

Still unaware of the danger, I drove the two miles of dirt road that connected with a paved road leading down the mountain toward home. Soon I met two women in a truck towing a horse trailer coming toward me. They flagged me down and said, "There is a fire. It is bad. You cannot get through this way. Turn around."

TROUBLE AHEAD

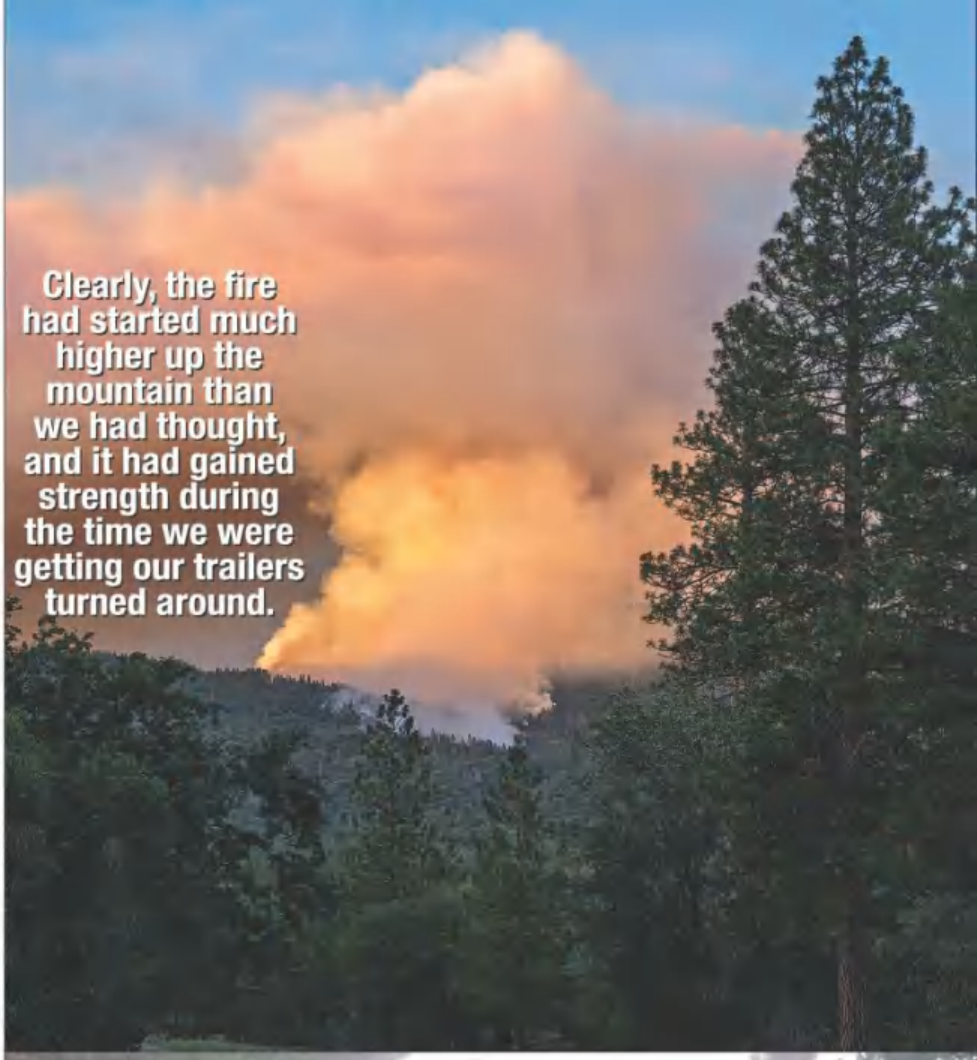
Then the first of many small miracles occurred: There was actually a place to turn around. The women had devised a plan to turn off onto a forest service dirt road, which would lead to a small community called Sugar Pine. I got in line behind what was becoming a small caravan of six trucks pulling horse trailers, including some big three-horse rigs.

We got onto the forest service road, and within a short distance I was thankful that my vehicle is four-wheel drive. We bounced our way around and through ruts for many miles, stirring up what felt like the Dust Bowl. At this point we had not seen the fire and assumed it was some distance down the mountain. Soon the road forked, and the lead truck chose what appeared to be the most traveled route, which also aimed in the general direction of Sugar Pine.

I started to relax as the road smoothed out and even contained a little gravel. We had to be almost to civilization. Suddenly the caravan came to a stop. The road was a dead end.

We all got out to assess the situation.

DARVIN ATKESON



Clearly, the fire had started much higher up the mountain than we had thought, and it had gained strength during the time we were getting our trailers turned around.



TOO CLOSE: Dust and smoke from the wildfire darken the midday air as a ranger meets the caravan trying to escape the wildfire on a forest service road.

CINDY CASEY

Half a dozen horse trailers were lined up on a one-lane road. There was only a small turnaround area at the end, and pines, firs, cedars and brush lined the road on both sides. And there was still a wildfire out there somewhere, potentially headed our way. Our position was pretty much summed up when one woman said, "We are screwed."

One of my riding companions suggested that we notify someone of where we were and the predicament we faced. No one's cell phone had anything more than marginal service, but my truck is equipped with OnStar, which fortunately was working well. Within a few minutes OnStar had connected me to someone who worked for the Sierra National Forest and given them our exact location; we were told that law enforcement would be notified. I explained to the forest service person that we were turning around, but we wanted someone to know we were here, in case of trouble.

In the meantime, the other drivers were devising a plan. Somehow, with everyone working together, helping each other back and turn through the brush, we all got turned around. There was even one area that was wide enough to squeeze to the side, allowing the others to pass. This was the second miracle of the day, and no small one at that!

HOLDING **STEADY**

Fortunately, despite the long, bumpy ride—and all of the backing, turning and other maneuvering over uneven ground—I never heard any scrambling, kicking or whinnying from any of the trailers. All the horses seemed to be riding quietly and faring well.

Once we were moving again, our goal was to head back to the fork and take the other road, the one that looked less traveled. However, this would require a tight hairpin turn, and the first truck and trailer struggled for some time attempting it—which turned out to be our third small miracle. As the truck and trailer was still trying to negotiate the turn, a ranger arrived with lights flashing—a result, I later learned, of my call to OnStar.



TIGHT SQUEEZE: Turning around six horse rigs on a one-lane road required patience and teamwork.

CINDY CASEY

His news was both good and bad. The bad news was, we could not go that way. A car had gone down there and gotten stuck in a patch of deep, gooey mud. The good news: We did not get stuck in the mud, nor did we get stuck in another lineup behind the car, trying to figure out how to turn six rigs around again. So back out the rutted, dusty, bumpy road we went.

That meant, of course, that we were headed back toward the fire. The sky ahead was pitch-black with smoke, and ash was falling. Clearly, the fire had started much higher up the mountain than we had thought, and it had gained strength during the time we were getting our trailers turned around. The fire planes were flying close overhead, and the roaring sound only emphasized the danger.

Heading toward the raging fire was terrifying, but we had no choice. I was not alone in mentally formulating Plan B in case we had to abandon the trucks and trailers. If pressed, I suppose, we'd have tried to ride out on our horses.

As we got closer to the paved road, we found that law enforcement was now out in greater numbers, evacuating campgrounds and setting up barricades

to direct people to safety. National forest roads can be confusing, even when you've been given verbal directions, but the two women leading our makeshift caravan managed to navigate the several miles of dirt roads without mishap. When our route finally took us away from the fire, it was a tremendous relief to have the smoke in our rearview mirrors.

At last we reached pavement, descended the mountain and turned toward our respective homes. What a thrill it was to be safely back on the main roads, especially as we looked back at the huge billows of smoke from the tremendous fire. I could only think of getting home as soon as possible to get my poor horse out of the trailer.

ONE LAST **SURPRISE**

But the day had one more curve to throw me: I was zipping down the highway when I had to slam on the brakes to avoid hitting a good-sized black bear, who had crossed right in front of my truck. I didn't hear any noise in the trailer as a result of my quick braking, so I assume Zory kept his balance one more time.

The bear lumbered away untouched, and then we were home at last!

The usual one-hour drive had taken six hours, but we were both safe. Zory seemed a tiny bit wobbly for his first couple of steps on solid ground, sort of how I would feel when getting off of a boat. I thought he would head straight to his water, but instead he fell right into eating.

Zory is a real trouper about traveling—he has been riding in a trailer since he was 9 months old, and I often take him somewhere twice a week. Usually, he sleeps on the way home. I am grateful for his fortitude. Several times during the trip I had thought about stopping to get some water to him, but ultimately, I'd decided that staying with the caravan and getting out of the



AMONG GIANTS: The author, aboard Zory, pauses at the base of the Bull Buck Tree, a giant sequoia in the Sierra National Forest that stands 247 feet tall.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: STICK TOGETHER

If you're with other people in the same predicament, stay with the group. You'll be able to pool your resources and perhaps benefit from their knowledge of the area. Also, if local authorities need to coordinate an evacuation, it'll go faster and easier if they don't have to search for everyone individually.



CLIX PHOTOGRAPHY



COURTESY, CINDY CASEY

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: WHAT TO CARRY

• **Communication devices.** Three types of electronics are useful in the backcountry. The most common are those that utilize cell service, like cell phones and the communication systems found in many vehicles. However, you cannot always rely on cell signals in wilderness areas. The second type of device uses GPS satellites to show you where you are; these do not enable you to communicate with anyone, but they can help you locate roads and other topological features around you. The third type of device is a combined location and communication tool that utilizes satellites. In addition to showing you where you are, they allow limited two-way communications, such as texts, to emergency responders. These can be expensive, but they are the most reliable devices in remote areas.

I can personally vouch for OnStar, a navigation and communication system that comes built-in to General Motors vehicles (although you have to pay for a subscription for the service). You'll also find competing systems, with similar services that can be installed in any car or truck. OnStar still uses cell service but has a more powerful reception than a cell phone.

When you're riding, keep your phone or other devices in a pocket or fanny pack so they can help you if you're separated from your horse. Having car chargers for all of your electronics is also essential.

• **A paper map.** Use this as a backup and to familiarize yourself with the roads you intend to travel before you go. The Sky Fire emphasized this lesson. As a friend and I were later exploring the area where the fire occurred, we found another road that would have been a much better way out than the way we were sent. Later on, my riding buddy met a deputy who'd been involved in the evacuation that day, and he told her there had been some miscommunication—we had been sent the wrong way! Had we known about the better road during the fire, we would have questioned the people at the barricade who were directing us a different way.

Be aware, though, that national forest maps are not always accurate. They may show roads that are no longer maintained, or you may encounter roads that do not appear on the map. Plus, there is no way of knowing from a map whether a road is passable for a vehicle towing a trailer.



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• **Medications or other personal products.** For instance, I have blood sugar issues and am now stocking my trailer and horse pack with some extra emergency items I might need.

• **Extra food and water.** I keep a 20-gallon tub of water in my truck in the summertime, and although I didn't need it during the Sky Fire ordeal, I was comforted by the fact that it was there. Some nonperishable food stored in the tow vehicle or tack room of your trailer may be a godsend if you're stranded for many hours. Be aware, though, that it is never acceptable to leave food in a vehicle when you're in bear country. Some trailheads have food storage lockers (called "bear boxes") but many do not. Carrying extra food and water is a good idea in the wintertime, as well as the summers, in case you're stranded by ice and snow.

• **Supplies for your horse.** I normally carry a little food for my horse to enjoy on the trip home from a ride, but from now on I will carry an extra flake of hay in case we are out longer than expected.



SAFE AT LAST: Smoke is still billowing from the wildfire as the author and the other drivers finally reach the highway.

CINDY CASEY

forest before nightfall was my higher priority. Fortunately, he pulled through the ordeal just fine.

I thought again of the earlier comment from my riding companion, "That Bull Buck Tree will be here long after us." Again I thought, "I hope so." The fire was quite close to the Nelder Grove and totally out of control.

I'm sharing this story to encourage others to prepare for the unexpected. It is easy to get complacent when, week after week, we take our horses into the backcountry and just enjoy the day. I know my friends and I won't be taking those uneventful, relaxing rides for granted. We will appreciate each and every one.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: TRAILERING

- **Buy an appropriate tow vehicle.** When shopping for a new truck or SUV, choose one that has the power you'll need to haul the weight of your loaded trailer safely and comfortably. Four-wheel drive is practically essential if you ever leave paved roads—and the chances of that are much higher if you spend time in the backcountry. Also, always keep your vehicle in good repair, with routine oil changes, good tires and other regular maintenance.
- **Always start with a full tank of gas whenever you head to the backcountry.**
- **Keep a well-stocked toolbox on board.** Have on hand pliers, screwdrivers, a hammer, wrenches, a flat-tire repair kit, a flashlight with extra batteries, WD-40, extra fuses, emergency flares or triangles, bungee cords, duct tape, jumper cables,



a jack, a properly inflated spare tire, a fire extinguisher and anything else you might need to deal with mechanical emergencies. Other tools that might come in handy include a shovel, sand or gravel in the winter, trailer-wheel chocks, a trailer aid to assist in changing a flat on a trailer, a coupler lock and a crowbar.

• **Think about safety inside the trailer.** I usually use shipping boots on my horse and was happy that I had done so that day since he could have easily stepped on himself when trying to balance. I also use a breakaway trailer tie. In general, I like rope halters, but I prefer my horse to have a soft, nylon web halter when he's riding in a trailer. If he should need to use the tie for balance, or should he lose his balance, I don't want the knots of a rope halter to put pressure on his face.



DUSTY PERIN

Three weeks later, a friend and I drove back to the mountain to explore the dirt roads and see where we had been. It was sad to see all the acres devastated by fire. We were pleased to discover that the bumpy, rutted road had been smoothed out, and gravel had been added. We stopped out at the dead end. This area had been logged, which is why that branch of the road had been improved, and we also discovered places where some of the brush has been masticated with large cutting machines—this often leaves spikes of broken woody trunks sticking out of the ground. And I identified a fourth small miracle that had occurred that day—one of the rigs had pulled into a masticated area. Thank goodness he did not get a flat tire! My friend, a retired firefighter with years of experience towing and maneuvering large vehicles in tight places, was absolutely astounded that we got everyone turned around and out of that spot.

And, one final update: The Bull Buck Tree still lives, and the Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoias remained untouched by the recent fire.

About the author: Cindy Casey has been riding backcountry trails for 25 years, and for nearly a decade she participated in weekly long-distance day rides in the Yosemite National Park backcountry. She is currently riding her Kiger mustang, Zory, whom she purchased as a weanling and started herself. She and Zory enjoy shorter, relaxing rides these days, and also are taking dressage lessons. She is the author of *Yosemite on Horseback: Suggested Day Rides in the Backcountry.* She resides in Mariposa, California.

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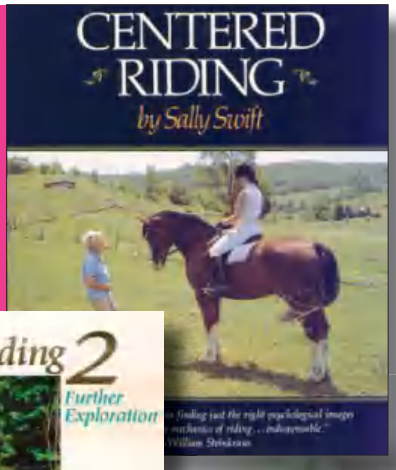
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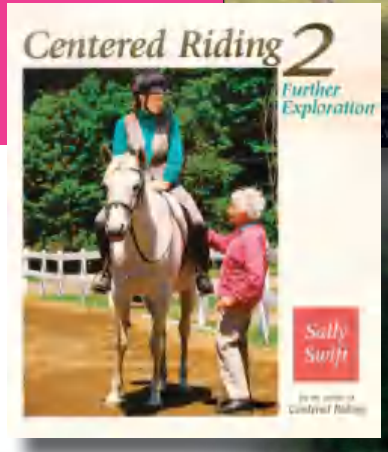
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WHAT SALLY SWIFT







COURTESY TRAFALGAR SQUARE

TAUGHT ME

Thirty years after the publication of *Centered Riding*, a leading instructor and clinician describes how Sally Swift changed her approach to riding, teaching and life.

By Susan E. Harris



In January 1985, I read an article in EQUUS that changed my life. It was the first of a two-part excerpt from Sally Swift's book, *Centered Riding.* Back then, Swift was traveling the country giving clinics to a growing following of riders eager to learn her techniques for developing improved self-awareness and body control. But her book—and its preview in EQUUS—was the first time Swift's fundamental concepts of breathing, soft eyes, centering and balance were shared with a wider audience.



I had ridden all of my life, but Centered Riding was different from all the other instruction I'd ever had. I was intrigued, so I tried the techniques out on Colonel, my Clydesdale/Thoroughbred field hunter with the trot from hell. Wonder of wonders, I could sit Colonel's trot! And it was easy and effortless, with a level of harmony and balance that I hadn't been able to achieve with that horse.

Ready to learn more, I decided to call Sally Swift. She spent an hour on the phone with me—a total stranger. A few weeks later I took my first official Centered Riding lesson and attended Sally's Centered Riding Instructor Clinic. I was hooked. And my riding, my teaching, my training and my thinking began a transformation that continues to this day.

The Centered Riding Instructor Clinic was a revelation. As a longtime professional, running a school for riding instructors, I had taken many lessons and clinics in dressage, jumping and horsemanship, some by prominent instructors and trainers. In all of them, I was told what to do—sit in this position, apply those aids, ride this exercise,

PHOTOS FROM SUSAN HARRIS

keep my back straight, eyes up, heels down and legs on. And, amid all of that, I was told to relax!

Some riders are gifted "naturals"—they don't know how they do what they do, but it comes easily to them (and many of them don't understand why the rest of us mortals have such trouble with the skills that come naturally to them). That's where Sally was so different. She taught us how to get the rider's body to achieve those things, how the rider's state of mind affects the body, and how both interact with the horse. It won't make the average rider into Charlotte Dujardin or Beezie Madden, but it can help riders of any level of skill or experience be the best they can be.



COURTESY TRAFALGAR SQUARE

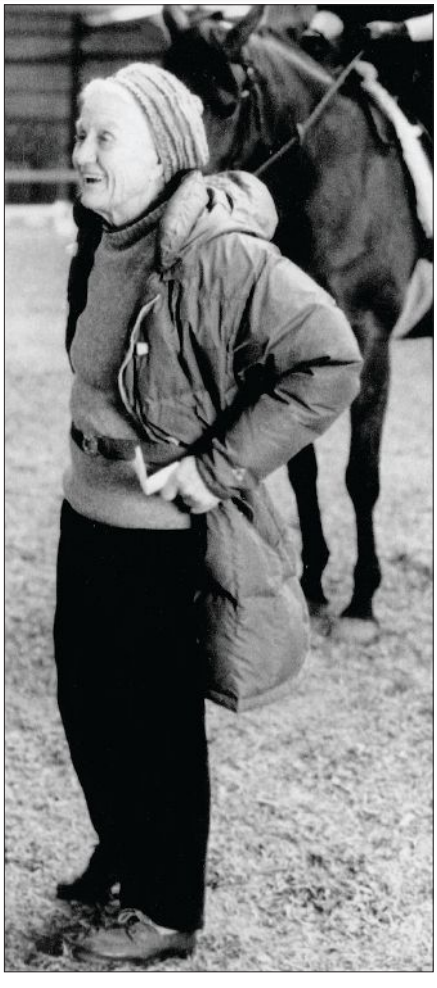
Another powerful aspect of that first clinic with Sally was her positive attitude in teaching, and the affirming learning environment she created. I had attended many clinics in which I'd heard not only negative comments from the clinician but a chorus of snarky comments from the spectators; you have to put on your mental armor to ride in such a situation. In Sally's clinic, she modeled a clear and supportive teaching style, so that by the first morning, when someone got something right or showed even a small improvement, the audience broke into spontaneous applause. I wanted more of that!

Who was this remarkable lady and how did she become one of the most influential riding teachers in world? Sally would tell a little of her story at every clinic, and I still do, too, so here it is, as she told it to me and others.

In her youth, Sally took lessons from some famous instructors of the day, including Vladimir Littauer and Col. Guirey of the Boots and Saddles School. Decades later, after she retired from work, she once again became active in the equestrian world.

IN THE **BEGINNING**

Sally Swift developed what came to be called Centered Riding because she had a disability. She had severe scoliosis as a young girl (possibly from an undiagnosed case of polio), and if you saw her walking, you might think, "What a crooked back that woman has." In the 1920s, she was in danger of living with a heavy back brace and possibly a wheelchair. Her parents sent her to a pioneering physical therapist and bodyworker, Miss Mabel Todd, who wrote a book called *The Thinking Body.* Miss Todd taught Sally about functional anatomy, and she introduced her to "ideokinesis," which means "the picture you hold in your mind moves your body."



FROM SUSAN HARRIS

Instead of telling Sally to stand up straight, Miss Todd would say, "Walk as if you had a string from your head to the clouds," or other images. Using mental imagery, which is now a common technique in sports psychology, helped Sally use her body automatically and gracefully. Todd also encouraged Sally to ride, not only because she was already a dedicated equestrian, but also because riding helped the two sides of her body to function more equally.

Meanwhile, young Sally had a secret. Deep in her body behind her navel, she envisioned what she called "that ball." When she needed to jump a big jump or stay on a horse that bucked, she had to drop "that ball" down deep in the mud; then she could do anything. But she didn't tell anyone because she thought they would laugh at her. That was not how riding was taught in the 1930s!

Throughout her youth, Sally took lessons from some famous instructors of the day, including Vladimir Littauer and Col. Guirey of the Boots and Saddles School, and she went on to become a riding instructor. She taught in summer camps and at a prominent girls' school. She mostly rode the forward seat in those days, but later she helped start the New England Dressage Association (NEDA). She also became acquainted with Denise McCluggage, author of *The Centered Skier* (1977), which influenced her thinking about centering applied to riding.



TEACHING AND LEARNING

When Sally entered college and eventually the working world, she began to ride less and less. But in the mid-1970s, after retiring from the Holstein-Friesian Association, in Brattleboro, Vermont, she once again became more active in the equestrian world. She began riding more frequently and taught riding to a few friends.

At the same time, she was experiencing trouble with her back, and she began to work with Peter Payne, who taught the Alexander Technique and the martial arts. In tai chi, she heard about the "dan tien" or "the center" and thought, "That ball—it has a name!" The Alexander Technique led her to understand more about the "use of the self" (a similar concept to that of a horse "using himself" well), and the importance of freedom and balance of the head and neck in order to free the back and allow the body to move lightly and without stress. Although not an Alexander Technique teacher herself, Sally studied with Majorie Barstow, Danny Pevsner and other Alexander Teachers here and in England. Sally was especially interested in music, and she gave a presentation to the Marlboro School of Music in Brattleboro, Vermont; some of the participants became so fascinated with "Centered Singing" that they signed up for Centered Riding lessons, too.

At this time, Sally was teaching riding and riding herself, though not

INSTRUCTION: Through groundwork and arena exercises, Sally Swift showed how body awareness, centering and imagery can improve riding.



FROM SUSAN HARRIS

competing, and working out how centering, tai chi and the principles of the Alexander Technique applied to teaching better riding. She'd go to clinics taught by Michael Page, Denny Emerson and Walter Christensen and take notes. These instructors knew that Sally did something with riders' bodies; sometimes, when they had a rider who was stiff, crooked, tense and having trouble, they'd ask Sally to work with them, and she'd get the rider into alignment, have them breathe, balance, release tension, and they'd be successful. Denny Emerson said, "Sally, you'd better write this down!" and that became the book *Centered Riding*—still the best-selling book on riding in 17 languages. Sally followed up that book with two DVDs on Centered Riding, and 17 years later, *Centered Riding II: Further Exploration.*

She said it took her 17 years to write the second book because every time she learned something new, she'd say, "Now I have to rewrite everything!"—and Sally was a lifelong learner!

THE **MASTER'S** APPRENTICE

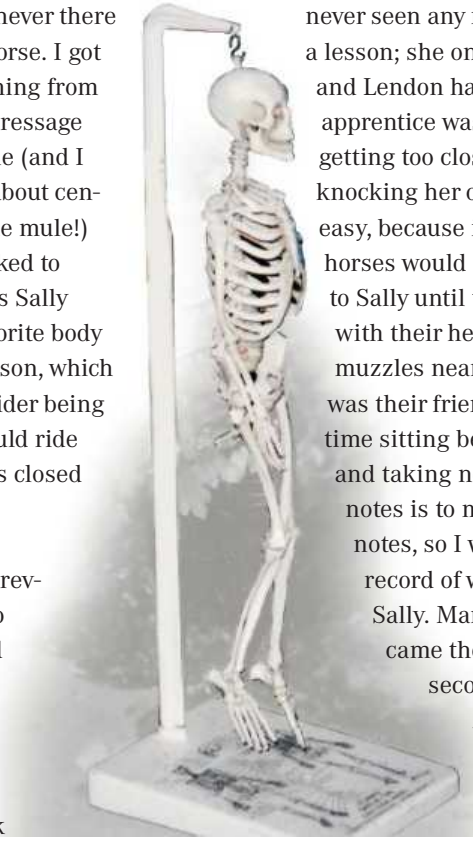
I followed Sally Swift around during the mid-1980s, and in 1989, I was lucky to be chosen as her apprentice and travel with her, taking lessons from her in Brattleboro between clinics. There were also lessons in the Alexander Technique, an extensive reading list and endless discussions of anatomy, centering, bodywork and riding theory—as well as how all of this applied to riding and teaching. We did 16 clinics in five months, driving around New England and traveling to Michigan, Oregon, Washington, California and Colorado.

When you were Sally Swift's apprentice, you carried the bags, helped with travel details, led horses in lessons, and rode whenever there was a spare horse. I got to ride everything from a grand prix dressage horse to a mule (and I learned a lot about centering from the mule!) I was often asked to lead a horse as Sally taught her favorite body awareness lesson, which involved the rider being led so they could ride with their eyes closed and go into "pure feel."



SCHOOLING: Sally Swift had many apprentices over the years.

Sally taught riders that if you get the skeleton in alignment, the muscles will follow—the opposite of "muscling" the rider into position or the horse into obedience.



This was a revelation even to very advanced riders; I was privileged to lead Lendon Gray's horse while she took a lesson from Sally, who said she'd never seen any rider get so much from a lesson; she only had to say it once and Lendon had it! Another duty of the apprentice was keeping horses from getting too close to Sally and possibly knocking her over; this was not always easy, because in every lesson the horses would move closer and closer to Sally until they were standing with their heads over her and their muzzles near her hair; they knew she was their friend. I also spent a lot of time sitting beside Sally as she taught and taking notes; my way of taking notes is to make sketches with a few notes, so I wound up with a visual record of what I learned from Sally. Many of those sketches became the illustrations for Sally's second book, *Centered Riding II: Further Exploration.*

One of Sally's favorite sayings was, "Ride

FROM SUSAN HARRIS

your bones!" She taught riders that if you get the skeleton in alignment, the muscles will follow—the opposite of "muscling" the rider into position or the horse into obedience. Sally always carried Herman, her 14-inch demonstration skeleton, with her in a little wooden box. Once we were required to open the box by airport security, and all the officers came over to examine the skeleton—we nearly missed our plane!

A **LASTING** LEGACY

Sally Swift's work was primarily directed at teaching riders to use their minds and bodies better. In particular, she focused on improving harmony and confidence between horses and riders, and in helping horses move better and use their bodies better through better balance, alignment and centering. She taught riders of all disciplines, including show riders, but she was sometimes distressed at seeing stress and tension in horses and riders in competition.

Sally and I attended a large New England Dressage Association show; one of the highlights was a grand prix freestyle competition. In that class, a bay stallion ridden by Bent Jensen performed a piaffe right in front of us—both horse and rider were so centered, balanced and in harmony in their work that Sally said, "Now I can go home with a happy heart!" Sally also admired the riding of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna, the Cadre Noir at Saumur, Bill Steinkraus and the late Reiner Klimke, among others.

Sally taught a lot about groundwork and bodywork, including how to find the center, align the body, and release excess tension both mentally and physically. This can have a profound and sometimes startling effect, especially if someone has been tight and releases the tension all at once. In one lesson, the world's most tense teenager came in with the world's most tense Thoroughbred. Sally did a little bodywork with the riders standing next to their horses, including a release of the head and neck. The girl must have had a huge release, because her eyes rolled up and she fainted—I thought, "My gosh, we killed her!" Sally said to rub her earlobes (an acupressure point for shock), and the girl sat up, shook her head, got on and had the best ride of her life! This doesn't happen often, but I was glad Sally was there—I might never have dared to do bodywork again!

Sally's work has many applications beyond riding. In 1997, she attended the American Riding Instructor Association National Conference, where she was honored as a Master Instructor. Many of the instructor candidates were nervous: They were scheduled to take a battery of certification tests the next day. Sally offered to work with them early in the morning; she got them breathing, using soft eyes, grounded and centered, and taught them the "bubble"—she had each person visualize being engulfed in a clear, protective bubble, in which they kept only positive things like confidence, calm, being organized and remembering what they had learned. Anything negative would bounce off the surface of the bubble. Then she had them move in a group, walking, running, even skipping—and nobody collided; every movement was smooth and coordinated. All 60 instructors floated out of the room with smiles on their faces, ready to face the testing with confidence.

Sally was a lifelong learner and always remained young in her thinking. She was positive, accepting and down-to-earth. When she walked into a room, everyone was drawn to her. She was humble, despite her fame, and connected easily with people of all ages and interests.

She once told me that in her youth, Capt. Federico Caprilli and his method of teaching jumping was a hot topic—everyone discussed the forward seat and was for it or against it. Nowadays, she said, few people even know Caprilli's name, but anyone who jumps uses his method. It was not her

THE **RIGHT TOUCH**

Sally was not a therapeutic instructor, but she sometimes helped riders with disabilities. Once she worked with a man who had a type of cerebral palsy that caused him to make constant involuntary movements. He studied riding and tai chi, and he was able to participate in many activities despite his constant movement.

Sally watched him ride, and then talked with him about the center, and how his center could become a place of calm; she used the image of leaves floating on still water. She placed her hands over his center and as they both breathed, he became quiet and still, first in his center, then up and down through his body, until he was sitting quietly on the horse with no involuntary movements. He walked the horse off, and rode around the ring, looking like a soft, quiet rider with no disability for those moments. Afterward, he was able to use centering to help control and cope with his condition.



Sally Swift died in April 2009 at the age of 95.

FROM SUSAN HARRIS

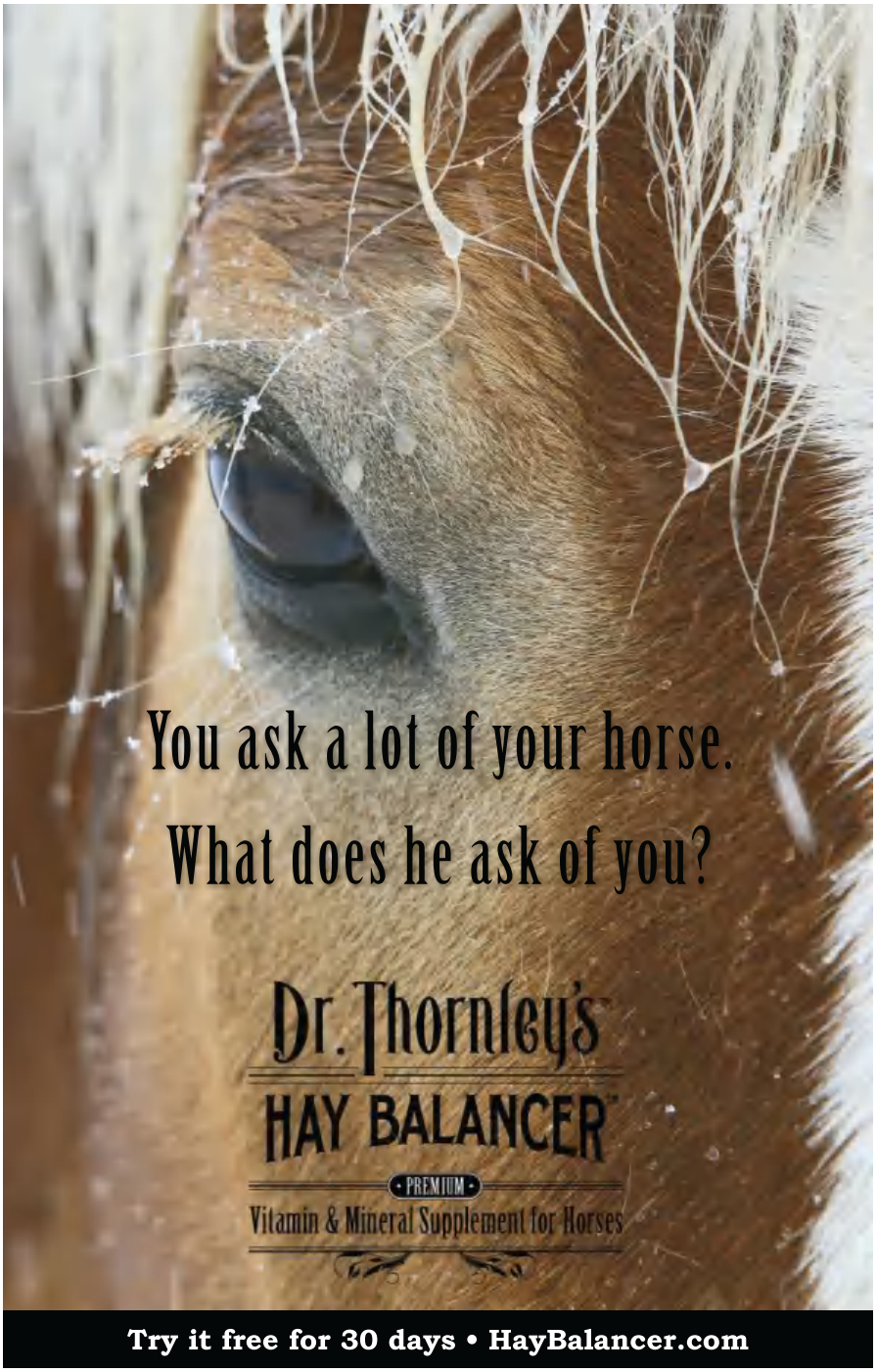
intention to start a separate seat or style of riding—she said she'd be happy if her principles of Centered Riding were eventually absorbed into all good teaching, as Caprilli's work was incorporated into horsemanship. Looking at the horse world today and the way so many of her techniques and theories have been adopted in virtually every riding discipline, I think she has succeeded.

Sally would be the first to say of her work, "This isn't really new—it's actually very old." But she made her work with the body, mind and horse clear and accessible to riders and teachers, and it has changed teaching and horsemanship around the world. This is her greatest legacy.

What I learned from Sally Swift changed my riding, my teaching and my life, and has taken me all over the world teaching Centered Riding. I'm especially interested in the biomechanics of the horse and the rider and in making these simple, clear and understandable to riders, trainers and instructors in all disciplines. Sally's tools of breathing, centering, balance, alignment and body awareness are the first ones I reach for when teaching or training. With these techniques, I can get horses to improve the quality of their movement by working through the rider. That better use of the body makes it easier to teach a classic seat in any kind of riding. Sally's work makes the teaching of riding clearer and easier and helps people work with their bodies even when they are far from perfect. It has made riding, teaching and training a more positive experience, and brings harmony and joy into the horse/rider/teacher relationship.

Thank you, Sally Swift!

About the author: Susan E. Harris is an international clinician and author from Cortland, New York. She is the author of *Horse Gaits, Balance and Movement, Grooming to Win* and the *U.S. Pony Club Manuals of Horsemanship.*







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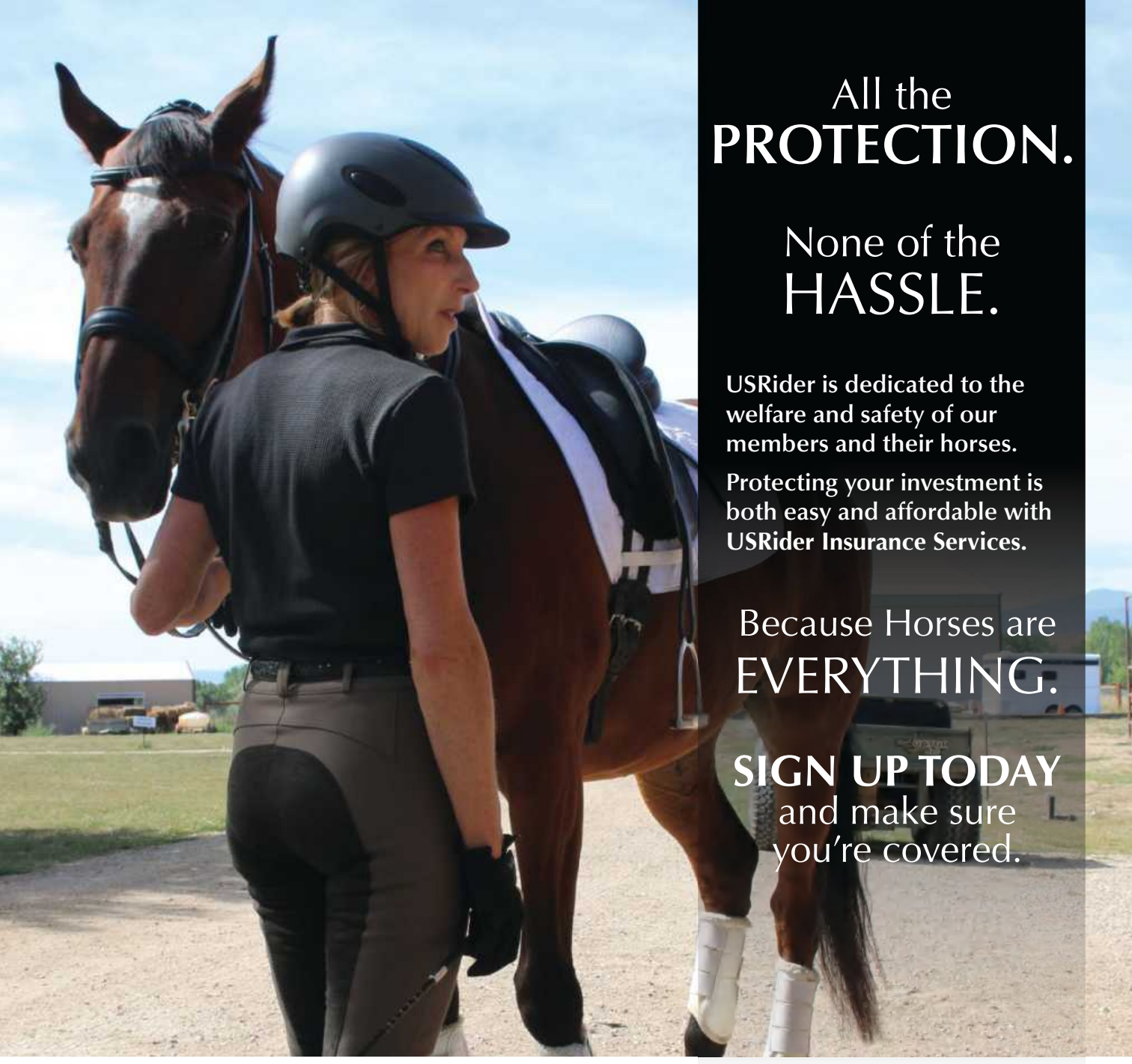
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Rescue me

After surviving a massive heart attack, I put one goal at the top of my bucket list—to own my own horse.

By Anne Howell

Gazing out into the green pasture dotted with horses, I can always immediately spot my Tucker, and my breath catches in sheer awe every time. Tucker is a 16-year-old, 18-hand Percheron I bought at auction more than four years ago. All I wanted to do was save his life, but he—quite literally—saved mine.

About two years before I found Tucker, I had a massive heart attack at a very young age. My doctors told me they couldn't believe I had survived the "widow maker." Even the emergency room staff came up to my hospital room to congratulate me on surviving—I was the first many of them had seen.

By the time I went home to recover, I'd had plenty of time to think about how lucky I had been and all the changes I would need to make in my life. It was then I made my bucket list, and the first item on it was a horse of my own. I had grown up riding, and I was eager to start taking lessons again once I got the go-ahead from my doctor.

I discussed it with my husband as I was recuperating, and being an instant gratification kind of person, I told him that I wanted my very own horse and sooner rather than later—and that I wanted it to be a rescue. Being the wonderful man that he is, my husband got in touch with Lisa Post, who owns a dressage barn and runs Helping Hearts Equine Rescue in Perrineville, New Jersey.

Thanks to Lisa's efforts, a large local auction has agreed to post to Facebook pictures of all the horses heading to the block each week—an effort that has so far prevented any from going to slaughter. After several months of monitoring the site, a friend alerted me to a posting for an older horse who was described as bombproof and easy to handle. Lisa assessed him and agreed he was a good match. He was a former Amish workhorse—a very large, very skinny black Percheron. He had rainrot[9], and his feet were a mess. But he was perfect. And soon, he was mine.



BEST MEDICINE: Working with Tucker has been good for the author's health and spirits.

Tucker was held in quarantine for a month before

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LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT - SOPHIE

PURINA

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Sophie was picked up by an animal control officer after receiving a report that her owner moved out and left her behind. Upon arrival, Sophie had a body condition score of a 2 on the Henneke Scale. She was very sweet and had good ground considering her condition.

Once Sophie reached a healthy weight, a volunteer posted Sophie's photo and description on Equine.com. It wasn't long before Singing River Equine rescue was contacted by a potential adopter. She was an experienced horse person and asked all of the right questions. Sophie was adopted and was taken to her new home for a visit. Singing River Equine Rescue volunteers were greeted by the adopter and her 9 year old daughter. It was love at first sight! There is no feeling like seeing a once abused and neglected horse find just the right person who you know will give them a permanent and loving home.

Thank you A Home for Every Horse and Equine.com for Sophie's forever home!

- Story told by: Kristi Mitchell - Singing River Equine Rescue, Inc.

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he was delivered to Lisa's barn. I visited every day so we could get to know one another, and each time I whispered in his ear that he was safe and loved.

My doctor was not in favor of me riding. I'd had a defibrillator/pacemaker installed, and I was still on blood thinners—a fall or even a seemingly minor injury around the barn could prove disastrous for me. But I was determined and a tad stubborn—I bought a protective vest to go with my helmet. I'd ridden hunter-jumpers in my younger days, but with Tucker's age and my fragile health, I agreed that dressage and light riding were the best choice for me now. Lisa got on Tucker first and determined that he was safe.

And then I got on. Sliding into that saddle for the first time I felt reborn, rejuvenated and alive for the first time since my heart attack. Tucker was indeed bombproof. Nothing startled or annoyed him, and soon his playful personality started emerging.

We discovered trail riding, although for Tucker it was a buffet just made for him. Being so tall, he loved grabbing and munching on branches along the way.

Tucker was not one to come running when I came to the gate and called his name. No sir, he made me walk a half-mile down a hill to bring him back up to ride. This became a daily ritual—I feel he secretly enjoyed seeing me tramping down to get him. We discovered trail riding, although for Tucker it was a buffet just made for him. Being so tall, he loved grabbing and munching on branches along the way.

In my second year with Tucker, Lisa held a small dressage show at her barn. Tucker and I entered a couple of introductory classes that required only walking and trotting. We received a second and fifth place. For me the real joy came just from stopping and saluting the judges at the end of each test—it was an indescribable feeling.

Shortly after our test, Tucker started having problems with his feet. He'd had the occasional abscess, but this time he developed several that were quite severe. Then one night I had to call my veterinarian at midnight—Tucker had developed mechanical founder in his left front hoof. My veterinarian wrapped the foot but told me that due to Tucker's size and weight—almost 2,000 pounds—it didn't look good. We'd try stall rest and hand-walking, and in the morning our farrier would be out to build a cushion, but I was told not to get my hopes up.

Every day, like clockwork, I came to the barn and walked Tucker. I sang to him, discussed politics, cooking and how he and I were going to have many more years together. He, of course, hung on every word. For six months, through Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year holidays, I walked with him. And, much to everyone's surprise, he remained sound as he grew out his new hoof. By spring, he was able to go out by himself during the day, and now, almost two years later, he is turned out 24-7 with a Mini named Finster I adopted for him.

Tucker is now retired, due to severe ringbone[0] in both front feet, but he is pasture sound and free of pain. I am blessed to be his caretaker for the rest of his life.

Not long ago I went to have another cardiac test done. The extensive damage that had occurred during my heart attack has been reversed a bit, and my heart is pumping much more efficiently.

My doctor, who once had so opposed my riding, finally admitted that walking a 2,000-pound horse uphill every day, plus grooming and riding, had indeed saved my life. Honestly, I hadn't been expected to survive this long. Some may say I saved Tucker, but I know he is the one who really saved me.

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RIDING

Is posting easier on a horse's back?

Q *In "Old Masters" (EQUUS 441), a rider "rode standing in the stirrups to ease stresses on his horse's back." I have also heard other riders say they post or stand in the stirrups to take weight off their horses' backs.*

As someone who's studied engineering and physics, I wonder if standing really benefits the horse. The stirrups are connected to the saddle and, apparently, the saddle still distributes a rider's weight onto the same area of a horse's back regardless of whether the rider is sitting, standing or posting. Sounds to me like standing or posting is for the comfort of the rider and not the horse! Have any studies or experiments borne out this thought? (I enjoy relaxing on my Quarter Horse, who is very comfortable at various trotting speeds, with or without a saddle.)

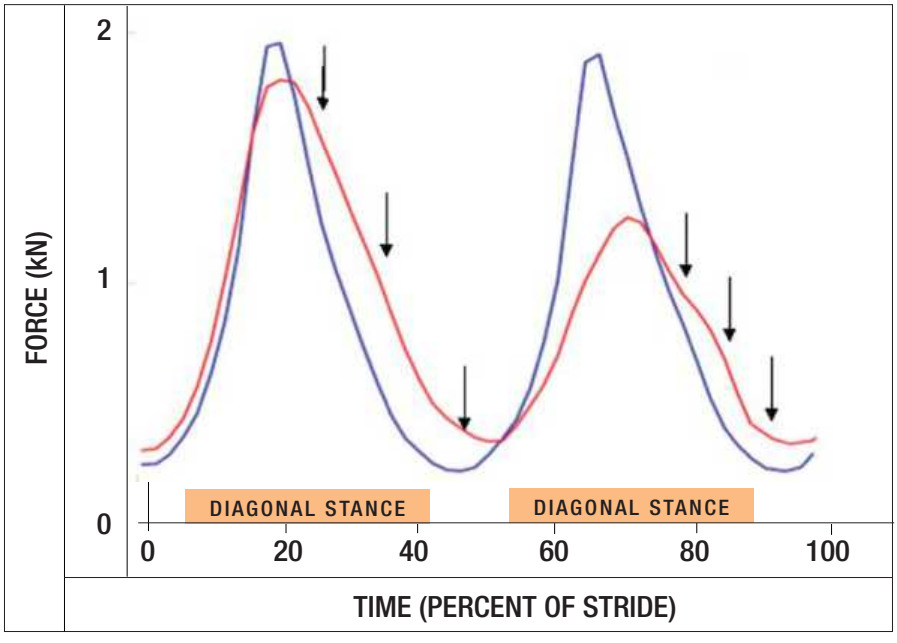
Carl Stephanus
Berryville, Virginia

A: This is a great question and one that researchers have been studying using pressure mats beneath the saddle and mathematical modeling. Saddle pressure mats measure the force applied to the horse's back and the pressure distribution pattern. Using pressure mats, researchers have shown that the force exerted by the rider on the horse's back changes at different stages of the stride; in other words, it increases and decreases in rhythm with the horse's movements.

At the trot, for example, the horse's body descends when the diagonal limbs are grounded then rises as the horse pushes off into the suspension phases. When sitting the trot, the rider follows the horse's movements—the rider sinks into the saddle during the diagonal stance, and the force on the horse's back increases. As the horse's body starts to rise, the rider feels a push from the saddle and the force on the horse's back is at its highest. During the suspension phase the force decreases. So the force on the horse's back increases and decreases in a regular pattern.

When the rider stands in the stirrups, the hip, knee and ankle joints flex as the horse's body rises in the suspension phases, which compresses the rider's leg length. Then these joints extend to lengthen the rider's legs as the horse descends in the diagonal stance phase. As a result of these changes in leg length, the rider undergoes less vertical motion than the horse. Thus the rider glides along at a fairly constant height above the ground while the horse is bouncing up and down. Saddle pressure recordings show that the peaks in the force curve are smoothed out—the minimal values are higher and the maximal values are lower.

In a rising (posting) trot, the feet push down against the stirrups to provide the force that raises the rider out of the saddle. This results in an increased force on the horse's back toward the



PEAK FORCES: This graph illustrates the forces placed on a horse's back during one complete trotting stride while the rider is sitting (blue line) and posting (red line). The sitting trot shows two symmetrical peaks during the diagonal stance phases and two symmetrical troughs in the suspension phases. When posting, the rider is sitting during the first diagonal stance then rising out of the saddle during the second diagonal stance. Both peaks are lower for the posting trot, especially when the rider is rising out of the saddle. The arrows indicate times when the force is higher during the posting trot.

end of the sitting phase. Therefore, the heights of the peaks and troughs become asymmetrical on the left and right diagonals. The peak force is higher for the sitting diagonal than for the rising diagonal, and both diagonals have lower peak forces than at the sitting trot, as shown by the red line on the graph.

So the answer to the question of whether the force or weight on the horse's back differs between the three options for riding the trot is "yes and no." The total force of the rider's weight on the horse's back over the entire stride is the same for the three riding techniques. In mathematical terms, the integration of the force curves for sitting trot, posting trot and standing in the stirrups would yield the same value.

However, the force is distributed differently over time for the three techniques—the sitting trot has the highest force peaks. We assume that when the rider posts or stands in the stirrups, the lower force peaks are "easier" on the horse's back.

Hilary Clayton, BVMS, PhD, DACVSMR, MRCVS
Sport Horse Science
Mason, Michigan

THIS MONTH'S EXPERT



As president of Sport Horse Science, **Hilary Clayton, BVMS, PhD, DACVSMR, MRCVS**, is a consultant, author and speaker with the goal of educating people about the "biomechanical and physiological basis of equine performance and the interaction between the rider, the tack and the horse." Previously she was Mary Anne McPhail Dressage Chair in Equine Sports Medicine at Michigan State University, where her research focused on equine locomotion and biomechanics. She received her veterinary degree and doctorate from the University of Glasgow in Scotland. In her spare time, she trains her horses and competes in dressage.

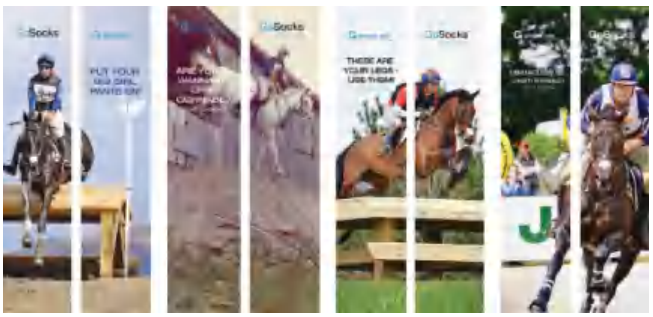
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GREAT Gift IDEAS



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Cowboy Dressage

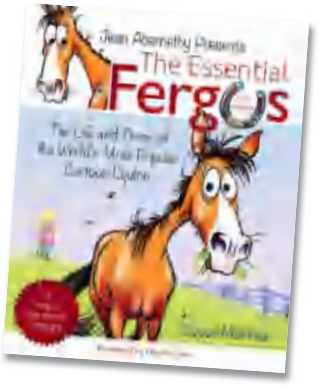
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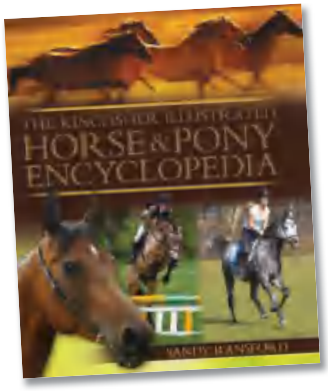
In this new book, lifelong horsewoman Jessica Black traces the evolution of Cowboy Dressage back to its roots, sharing the story of Eitan and Debbie Beth-Halachmy and their phenomenal Morgan horses. Striding the line between utterly engaging story and well-organized how-to manual, *Cowboy Dressage* gives readers everything they need to find a "soft feel" with their horses and then share what they've developed with a community of like-minded horse people.
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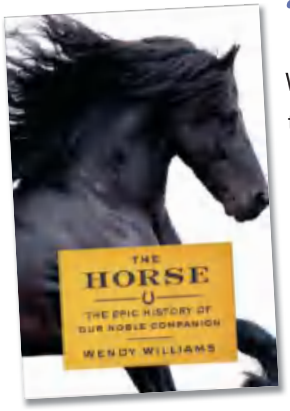
In her new book, Jean Abernethy has brought together the backstory of Fergus the Horse—how he came to be, his early years, the history of his "friends" and support characters—and combined that with his "greatest hits," including the most-loved comic strips and cartoon moments, some rarely seen sketches, and brand new additions created exclusively for this book. The result is a lively, colorful, highly illustrated treasury that will entertain anyone with an eye for a horse and a need for a laugh. **#ZF922, 128pp., $19.95**



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The Kingfisher Illustrated Horse & Pony Encyclopedia by Sandy Ransford is a fantastic gift for children who dream of having a horse or pony of their own. There is a clear introduction to the horse, followed by chapters explaining horse and pony care, riding lessons and breeds. The encyclopedia is packed full of gorgeous photographs of horses and ponies—showing how they look, what they do and where in the world they are found. And of course every horse lover wants to ride, so *The Kingfisher Illustrated Horse & Pony Encyclopedia* takes the novice rider from first mount to cantering and galloping. Recommended for ages 10 and up.

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The Horse

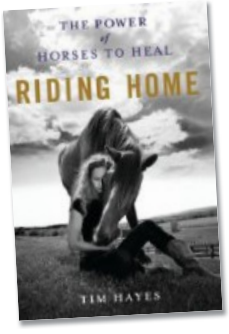
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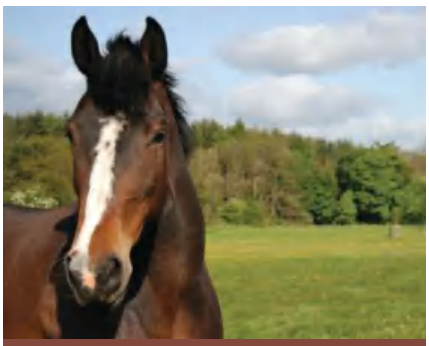
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EQ GLOSSARY

anaphylactic shock (anaphylaxis)—acute, massive, often fatal allergic reaction triggered by the introduction of an antigen into a horse who already has become hypersensitized to that antigen.

antigen—substance, often a protein, that the body's immune system recognizes as foreign and reacts to by producing an antibody.

antioxidant—substance that inhibits the chemical addition of oxygen to another substance.

body condition score (BCS)—a designation, based on a nine-point numeric scale, indicating the amount of fat on a horse's body. A BCS is assigned after a visual and hands-on appraisal.

bronchi (bronchial tubes)—airway tubes extending from the trachea into both lungs; the "branches" of the respiratory "tree."

bronchioles—smallest divisions of the bronchi; the "twigs" of the respiratory "tree."

cervix—constricted part or "neck" of an organ; often refers to the outer end of the uterus.

corticosteroids—analogs of the hormone cortisol produced primarily by the adrenal glands; they may be natural or synthetically produced for injection.

endoscope—small, flexible tube equipped with light and a viewing device; used to examine or operate on body passages or internal organs.

endotoxins (bacterial pyrogens)—poisonous substances produced within bacterial cells and released when those cells are destroyed.

equine metabolic syndrome—endocrine disorder characterized by increased fat deposits in specific locations of the body or overall obesity; insulin resistance, which leads to abnormally high levels of the hormone circulating in the bloodstream; and a predisposition toward laminitis in the absence of other recognized causes.

estrus—phase ("season") in the mare's reproductive cycle in which the egg (ovum) matures and is released into the oviduct.

founder—internal deformity of the foot resulting from rotation of the coffin bone due to simultaneous detachment from the hoof wall and pull by the deep flexor tendon and gravity.

insulin resistance—metabolic disorder, similar to type-2 diabetes, that occurs when certain cells in the body become less sensitive to the action of insulin, and normal amounts of the hormone can no longer keep adequate amounts of glucose moving into the cells for use as fuel.

laminitis—inflammation of the sensitive plates of soft tissue (laminae) within the horse's foot caused by physical or physiologic injury. Severe cases of laminitis may result in founder, an internal deformity of the foot. *Acute* laminitis sets in rapidly and usually responds to appropriate, intensive treatment, while *chronic* laminitis is a persistent, long-term condition that may be unresponsive to treatment.

mediators—biochemicals released when injured tissue stimulates the inflammatory process. Actions caused or aided by different mediators produce swelling, heat, pain and, ultimately, healing.

neutrophil—type of white blood cell that fights acute bacterial infections and is the main constituent of pus.

rainrot (rain scald)—crusted, painful, infectious skin inflammation, caused by *Dermatophilus congolensis,* which lifts the hair and removes it at its root, resulting in slipping away of affected areas of the hair coat; triggered by moisture.

ringbone—arthritis of the pastern joint ("high ringbone") or coffin joint ("low ringbone").

skeletal muscles—muscles surrounding the bones and controlling their movement.

smooth muscles—muscles lining and controlling the actions of blood vessels and the digestive, urinary and reproductive tracts. Their movements are involuntary and automatic.

teratogen—any agent, including viruses, drugs and environmental pollutants, that can disrupt the development of an embryo or fetus, causing a birth defect.

ultrasound—high-frequency sound waves, above the range of human hearing. Ultrasound is used diagnostically, to image body structures, and therapeutically, to break down unwanted tissue and promote healing by stimulating circulation.

uterine horn—left and right upper projections in the Y-shaped uterus of the mare, connecting the fallopian tubes to the body of the uterus.

white cells (leukocytes, white blood cells)—colorless blood cells active in the body's defense against infection or other assault. There are five types: neutrophils, lymphocytes, eosinophils, monocytes and basophils.

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True Compass

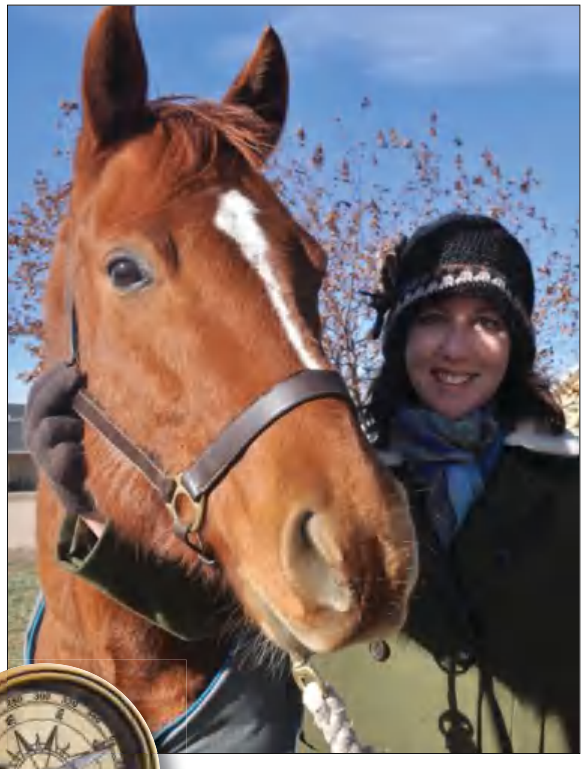
My horse told me exactly what I needed to hear, once I was willing to listen.

By Deborah Linne

I just lost it. I slumped over in the saddle and bawled like a baby. All of the stress and sadness and helplessness that had filled the last 24 hours had pushed its way to the surface and couldn't be contained anymore. My trainer stood next to me, her hand on my knee, waiting.

Compass, my big chestnut horse, stood quietly, relaxing more with every moment, his head dropping toward the ground. Every muscle melted under me until we were both a pool of quiet and clarity. The lesson didn't begin this way. We had started at "rough," spiraled into "giant mess" and galloped rapidly toward "Danger! Get off now!" All in 15 minutes.

Let me back up. One thing that draws me to my horse, aside from his sweet baby face, is the fact that he is one of the most sensitive creatures I have ever met, human or animal. Usually, this works in my favor. I use only the lightest of touches with my legs and reins, and he responds.





"Finally, I walked to the middle of the arena and said to my trainer, 'I don't think I can do this today.'"

But Compass also has an unusually strong sense for my emotions, and he mirrors them back to me without fail. When I'm happy and relaxed, he is too. When I'm feeling goofy and playful, he's ridiculously funny and cute. And when I'm angry, sad or irritable, he is right there with me. It's like having a mirror of my heart held up to my face every time I'm near him.

I was brokenhearted on the day of my lesson, but I decided to ride anyway, hoping it would help put me back together. But from the moment I arrived, Compass was jumpy. He moved away from the grooming brush. He spooked at the dogs. He swished his tail and didn't want to be saddled.

And when I got on? Oh boy. Head tossing. Off-balance. Uncooperative. Every muscle was filled with tension. I took a deep breath and tried to ride through it; I wasn't going to put up with his antics. I tried to ignore the fit and ride harder and more precisely, and he got harder and more determined to unseat me.

Finally, I walked to the middle of the arena and said to my trainer, "I don't think I can do this today." And the meltdown began.

Compass immediately began to relax. All of his hardness and tension dissipated as I wept. By the time I was done, his head was hanging so low that his nose almost touched the ground. He gave a deep sigh and licked his lips, almost napping. My trainer asked, "Do you want to stop for today?" No. I needed to work through this.

Well, after that we had the best 45 minutes of riding we'd had in a month. Compass worked hard, trying to do whatever I asked. Since then, I've thought through what my gelding was trying to teach me, and it's pretty obvious, really. As he would say it: "First, don't ever think you can hide your emotions from me. Often, your emotions make me darned uncomfortable. Do you mind getting it together, please?"

Next, "You claim you're the leader. Act like it." And, finally, "I live in the moment. As soon as you're ready, I'll forgive you, forget it and move on to the next thing."

It's also clear to me now that my own heart was telling me the same thing. I just needed my horse to express it clearly: Be honest. Don't stuff your feelings. Work through it, even if that means having a mini-meltdown. Then look forward. Move on. Find your joy.

I knew I named him Compass for a reason. He always knows where to find True North and is determined to show me the way.

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